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UNLEARNING RACISM:
A CANDID SELF-STUDY BY A EUROPEAN AMERICAN
EDUCATIONAL LEADER

A Dissertation Presented

by

Edorah J. Frazer

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education
Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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ABSTRACT

Racism damages all of us. It degrades the lives of some, it diminishes the integrity of others, and it saps our resources and threatens our peace as a nation. Racism in the United States takes place on multiple levels: within and between individuals, in our cultural milieu, and in our social institutions. In this dissertation, I describe ways in which I have both encountered and perpetrated racism personally and professionally as an educator. I then explore ways in which racism can be unlearned by individuals and dismantled institutionally, particularly in the arena of education, so that our nation can be liberated from this most crippling disease.

As a European American woman raised in affluence, my story is about unearned privilege on several levels, and my research asks the question of what I can responsibly do about that. However, my upbringing and the ongoing influences of mainstream America ask very different questions about dominant status; namely, what can one do *with* it? And how can one get more? This tension between power and responsibility forms the context for an examination of privilege in this scholarly personal narrative about unlearning racism.

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DEDICATION

For Molly, Jevon and all the young people who call me to create a just and engaged society

For African American men and boys ~ each one of you matters to me

In memory of Augusta Sumrall

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It's not up to you to finish the work, but neither are you free not to take it up.

Talmud

The solution to racism lies in our ability to see its ubiquity but not to concede its inevitability. It lies in the collective and institutional power to make change, at least as much as the individual will to change. It also lies in the absolute moral imperative to break the childish, deadly circularity of centuries of blindness to the shimmering brilliance of our common, ordinary humanity.

Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights:
Diary of a Law Professor*

Racism damages all of us. It threatens the lives of some, it degrades the integrity of others, and it saps our resources and threatens our peace as a nation. Racism in the United States takes place on multiple levels: within and between individuals, in our cultural expressions, and in our social institutions. In this dissertation, I describe ways in which I have both encountered and perpetrated racism personally and institutionally. Through the examination of events from my life in dialogue with literature in the fields of race theory, critical white studies and multiculturalism, I uncover and unpack formerly unconscious attitudes and beliefs that I have held regarding race and people of racial identifications other than my own. Finally, I explore ways in which individuals can unlearn racism and work to dismantle the institutionalized racism that is pervasive in our country.

In my professional life as an educator, I tell my students over and over again that their questions are valid and welcome, and that we can all learn best by exploring our

questions together. But privately, as a European American woman raised in affluence, I am often ashamed of my own ignorance, especially when it might result in harming someone else. The best antidote to this ignorance and resulting shame is learning, and in this case, unlearning.

I'm a European American, able-bodied, gentile woman in my forties who was raised in affluence, lives a heterosexual lifestyle and has advanced academic degrees. With the exception of gender, each of these identities places me in a dominant position in our society. Thus my story is about unearned privilege on many levels, and my research ultimately asks the question of what I can do, responsibly, about that.

My upbringing, however, and the ongoing influences of mainstream America ask a very different question about dominant status, namely, what can one do *with* it? And how can one get more? This tension between power and responsibility forms the context for an examination of privilege in this scholarly personal narrative about unlearning racism.

The title of my dissertation implies that I have racism within me. In these pages it will become clear that my feelings, thoughts and actions indicate that this is, in fact, true. How can I have spent years reading, writing, listening and more recently, speaking truth to power about racism and still harbor beliefs about white supremacy? Because this is the default setting of my belief system established in childhood. When I'm exhausted or distracted or simply very relaxed, I sometimes find myself slipping back into old patterns of thought. I have encountered elderly people, who were quite civilized in their prime, launching into virulent racist diatribes toward and about their caregivers of color as they

also reverted to childlike behaviors. Harboring racist beliefs, even if you are careful not to utter them, is not a harmless state. You might be able to put out the exposed flames of racism, but the cinders can smolder underground and rise again unexpectedly. Like skilled firefighters, people of color and sensitized European Americans can see and hear the racism that most white people can't (or won't) identify in themselves or in each other.

ALANA people (African-, Latin-, Asian-, and Native Americans) are not the only ones at risk in a racist culture. Racism comes at a cost to all of us. Of the 30 "Costs of Racism for White People" Alan Creighton lists in *Helping Teens Stop Violence*,¹ I have experienced 28, and I could add to the list. From feelings of fear, guilt, shame, helplessness and hopelessness, to a lack of experiences and friendships with large portions of our fellow citizens, to missed opportunities for education and a widespread sense of community, the costs of racism are dear.

In order to unlearn racism, we need to enter into, and then to stay in the conversation across races. For the European Americans in that conversation, that means focusing intently on listening, since our messages are disproportionately broadcast through our media and social institutions. Our voices are heard, incessantly, on one level, forging a definition of normalcy that is exclusive and a societal agenda that is persistently inequitable. On the other hand, there are essential parts of our European American stories that we hesitate, and mostly fail, to tell. This dissertation gives voice to the unuttered parts of my European American story.

I remember a time when my father made a racial slur that I had never heard before. My mother shushed him, but the image entered my mind and will probably

always remain there, barring brain damage. I have never heard the slur again, nor repeated it, and I hope that with me it will die forever. This is just one small image, but since it involves food, it pops into my head each time I see a certain item in the grocery store. I wish I had never heard it. I would like to forget it, but instead, I am accosted by this image over and over again – an image that took all of one second for my father to let slip. Multiply this image by the number of times it comes up, and then by the number of additional racist images in my mind, and the problem grows bigger. Now multiply the number of white people in this country (assuming the number of racist images in my head is about average), and there's a big problem. Unlearning racism is a process of radical editing.

Since I have absorbed 46 years of racist messages – from family and friends, from the larger culture, from the institutions I inhabit – the mess I harbor within is daunting. How can I clean out my race closet? Then, how can I protect myself from filling it again? When racist messages come at me, how can I make sure that I recognize them for what they are and successfully deflect them?

As educators, we need to help people learn to deflect harmful misinformation of all kinds. Culturally, racism comes through our cell phones, car stereos, newspapers, magazines, beverage cups and cereal boxes. Some of this can be avoided. I choose not to watch television, and I avoid bringing many aspects of popular culture into my home. I block pop-up ads on my computer and junk mail from my mailbox. But even then, I encounter racism every day. I read my local newspapers and the *New York Times*. I watch select movies and leaf through magazines. I listen to children's music and public radio.

These media sources are more benign than many, but they still contain a constant flow of images and stories that set whiteness as the norm and that cast negative associations on everyone else.

Institutionally, racism plays more subtle games. In her article, “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” Peggy McIntosh listed a number of common but unacknowledged privileges afforded to white people in the United States that are denied ALANA people.² The wide dissemination of this article has helped many European Americans become conscious of the privilege that is their daily fare. In addition to dealing with the racial stereotypes that infuse our cultural environment, dismantling racism requires a critical analysis of the way that power is distributed and inequitable social strata are reproduced in our social institutions.

Rationale

I have been a teacher, a school administrator, and an educational consultant, and I am currently an instructor and administrator in the educational leadership program at the University of Vermont. In the fall of 2000, early in my doctoral studies, I initiated my research on race by conducting an analysis of the racial harassment policy at an urban Vermont high school. After interviewing the principal and reviewing relevant documents, my inquiry extended beyond the school to include community activists and parents who were working on the issue. The literature I reviewed and the interviews I conducted challenged me to search for the core of the problem. My research ultimately encompassed

a much broader focus than racial harassment at the high school; I found myself necessarily considering the phenomenon of racism itself.

As I looked more deeply into the dynamics of racial harassment in schools, I discovered that harassment policies were essentially punitive, not educative. I consequently began to research antiracist curricula. I looked for curricula that were especially designed for use in predominantly European American environments, and I spoke to educators and consultants who do prejudice reduction work in Vermont schools. Soon I recalled what I already knew as an educator: that the curriculum is only as good as the teacher's skill in implementing it. I had to think about how European American teachers would develop the skills, confidence and commitment to fully implement an antiracist pedagogy and curriculum.

Finally, as an educational leader, I began assessing my own readiness to lead a school staff in professional conversations, curriculum development and community-wide education and dialogue about racism. I began asking myself hard questions about my racial habits of mind and behavior. This journey inevitably took me inward, ultimately to discover the sticky roots of racism within myself. My questions evolved from "How do we deal with racial harassment in schools?" to "How does one unlearn racism?" to "How can *I* unlearn racism?" and finally, to "How can I work to eliminate racism?"

When I was conducting interviews for the racial harassment study, I observed myself hesitating to interview ALANA community members. I was fearful that I did not have the cultural competence to navigate a discussion about racism in our community without somehow offending people or exposing my own ignorance or racist assumptions.

As I proceeded through my research, I traveled a spiral staircase of white identity development.³ After one of my interviews, I remember walking through Burlington thinking, “No one in my family and none of my friends are involved with the issue of racism at all. If I go further down this path, and especially if I choose to study racism for my dissertation, I will enter a new community and ally myself with a new group of people. What will that do to my life?” Later I wondered, *what will it do to my life if I don’t?*

As I applied each of my research questions to myself as an educational leader in Vermont, I found myself exploring my own gut, my own belief system, my own training, and my own prejudices, intuitions and intentions. As my questions grew more rigorous and personal, it became clear to me that I needed a methodology that could reliably penetrate the layers of protection people carry around their racial attitudes. As highly visible public employees entrusted with caring for people’s children, teachers are especially vigilant about presenting themselves as unbiased. I doubted that I could develop a quantitative or qualitative study to accurately research the racial attitudes and practices of European American educators to the depth that would reveal their core beliefs about race. My best bet, I concluded, was to peel back the layers of attitude, belief and experience within myself.

For a while in the midst of my research, I was tired of focusing on racism and wanted to be done with it. At the same time, I knew that ALANA people did not have the luxury of walking away from it. Beverly Daniel Tatum describes the power and joy of breaking through to the final stage of white identity development, Autonomy, a more

liberated stage of freedom and authentic pride.⁴ From time to time, I experienced new feelings of confidence and comfort in encountering people of other races, and I found a place of purpose within my whiteness. I wrote a few inspired pieces in speech form. I felt clear and strong.

Since then, my clarity and strength have ebbed and flowed, interspersed with periods of fear, anger, frustration and confusion. I am fortunate now to have a wider circle of friends (both European American and ALANA) with whom to discuss the complex issues and emotions surrounding race in the United States, and in Vermont, where I live. The research I have done in the process of writing this dissertation has fueled larger conversations about racism on personal and institutional levels that constitute the formation of a base for my ongoing antiracist work. When I began this dissertation research, I considered it the culmination of many years of education. It now seems more importantly to be the start of a new, more effective and collegial inquiry into the foundations of democracy and social justice.

Audience

In order to create social change of the magnitude of eliminating racism in our society, everyone from all parts of the spectrum of racial attitudes and experience needs to move forward. My narrative is written primarily for European Americans who might be moved to commit themselves to engage in their own inner work to explore whether they harbor racist assumptions, attitudes and/or practices, and ultimately to consider what they might do to unlearn them.

When people ask me what my dissertation is about, I tell them, “unlearning racism.” Then I watch their responses. Everyone pauses. ALANA people often nod and then look at me a little more closely, as if to discern my intention and whether I am likely to approach this work with authenticity. The European American inquisitors either blankly move on, almost as though I haven’t said anything, or they get excited and say, “That’s so cool!” But very few inquire further into the subject. Conversations about racism are often confusing and potentially painful, and most white people would rather leave the topic alone.

What gives me the authority to write on this subject? Which of my personas will tell this story and attempt to convey some wisdom in the end, without losing itself in the quicksand of privilege, arrogance and foundational ignorance? In the end, I am what I am, and though my writing persona attempts to be an expression of my “higher self,” I will remain in some part ignorant, and might also appear arrogant to some, aggravating to some, self-absorbed to some. But I must tell this story, in part to discover the wisdom in it myself, in part to further the conversation in a society that avoids and dreads this conversation about race. As the stories throughout my dissertation reveal, this narrative has been building all of my life, clamoring to be told.

The purpose of this dissertation is neither therapeutic nor cathartic; it is exploratory research. For the European Americans who will read this, I hope it catalyzes learning and reflection about your own stories, biases, understandings and misunderstandings regarding race. I hope it gives you courage to ask yourself hard questions about white privilege, white supremacy, and your place in the racial dynamics

of our nation. For ALANA readers, I worry that it will add to the injuries already imposed on you. My hope is that any such injury will be mitigated by my honest attempt at a bold look inside to unlearn racism. Or maybe my inquiry won't seem bold at all. Maybe I will seem more to be hiding than exploring, more to be deluding myself than shining an honest light. I hope anyone who thinks so will help me see this. And I do recognize the oft-denied gap between intention and action. My intention is to unlearn racism myself and to work to dismantle racism in our society. This scholarly personal narrative research is one action I'm taking toward that end.

Methodology

As I explored various aspects of racism throughout my doctoral course work, one research question led to the next, and before long it became clear to me that the most authentic research on racial prejudice must be done *within* the European American, and that the nature of this research is so personal, so gut-wrenching and elusive, that I couldn't hope to delve deeply enough into the racial beliefs of any person other than myself. For most European Americans, especially liberal ones (which describes the majority of teachers), our racial attitudes simply are not discussed. The subject is too delicate, too private, too protected by layers of fear and decorum, and too sublimated to be spoken aloud. I believe that most European American educators don't even know, in any conscious way, how they feel and think about race. And I didn't, until I started to write, and read, and write, and listen, and talk, and write. And still my research isn't

complete, even within myself. It's an exploration outward, and an excavation inward, iteratively. That's the essence of scholarly personal narrative.

Writing a scholarly personal narrative is a way to cull one's life for meaning, to review, explore, question and illuminate what one has experienced and to gain some wisdom from it. Thus I begin by looking to my upbringing, including societal, family and institutional messages I have received regarding race, to unravel the development of my racial attitudes. In this way, I hope to emerge from my research with a deeper understanding of how racism can be unlearned by individuals, and dismantled by society as a whole.

What is "unlearning"? Can we consciously erase something from our minds? In our attempt to do so, doesn't our focus on the subject at hand drive the thought more deeply into our minds and memories? When I was a child, my older brother used to tease me by saying, "Don't think about a hippopotamus," (watermelon, airplane, etc.) knowing that I would immediately focus on the item he had chosen, unable to divert my attention before it was too late. Though I can't will myself to forget something, I can perhaps renarrativize it to neutralize its power or harness useful meaning from it.

In the introduction to her own white race narrative, Lillian Smith describes the power of writing to transform: "The writer transcends her material in the act of looking at it, and since part of that material is herself, a metamorphosis takes place: *something happens within*: a new chaos, and then slowly, a new being" (emphasis in original).⁵ As I have engaged in this kind of writing and reading, my thinking, my behavior and my attitudes regarding race have evolved, and I have begun to gain some insights into how

racism can be unlearned. Along the way, I have encountered many layers of fear about this writing. The tensions involved in this topic have alternately held me back and driven me forward. What has held me back? Fear of what I might learn. How candid shall I be? Might I somehow drive racist impressions deeper into my psyche? Then, what's driving me forward? Sometimes it's loneliness. When I look at someone who has a different color skin and I want to reach them but can't, and I don't even know where to start, I feel existentially lonely. Other times I'm driven by the conflicting pains of prejudice and a deep yearning for justice.

Anne Braden writes, "...we who grew up white Southerners two and three generations ago learned something else the whole society needs to ponder. We found that when we turned ourselves inside out to face the truth, it was a painful process, but it was not destructive. Rather, it became a moment of rebirth – and opened up new creative vistas in our lives."⁶ Scholarly personal narrative offers the possibility of "turning ourselves inside out," not for personal catharsis, but to discover what Robert Nash calls "narrative overlap," those resonances and applications to others' stories that make one's personal experience universalizable.⁷

As a reader of Smith, Braden and others, and as the writer of my own narrative, the desire to explore the subject of race comes up again and again. Having engaged in this rigorous study, through self-reflection, reading, writing, conversation and a wide range of experiences aimed at addressing my own blind spots and illusions, I don't believe this work can or ever will be completed, within me or my peers and elders. I do have hope for future generations. As an educator, I am responsible for examining the

biases I carry toward my students and potential students, my colleagues and the society as a whole. I am not just an educator of individuals; I am an educator within my society and the world, and that role holds a responsibility to continually flush out ignorance, especially that which does damage. My hope is that my dissertation will stir readers to consider their own racial identities, leading to greater maturity for all of us relative to the issues addressed.

Language

Language is the basis of interaction, instruction and leadership. We can't work effectively on issues of race without deciding on some language, or at least venturing into some language, with which to address the topic. The reluctance of many European American people to talk about race has to do, in part, with confusion or worry about language. Many of the available terms in the vocabulary of race are problematic, so my approach is to point out the tensions in the available terminology, then to go on and use much of it, since it's the best we've got to work with for the time being. Though I explain my preferred terminology in the paragraphs below, throughout this dissertation I will at times expand my vocabulary for the purposes of variety and flow.

Terminology associated with racial issues can be cumbersome and marginally accurate, at best. Race itself is a social construct. It doesn't exist in physical terms; humans have no sub-species.⁸ Differences in skin pigmentation, hair texture and facial features exist, but there is no line that can sensibly be drawn between them that would

effectively divide people whose ancestors come from different origins, though throughout American history attempts have been made to do so.

Recently I attended a museum exhibit displaying human cadavers dissected in various ways to reveal different body systems.⁹ Once the epidermis was peeled back, there was of course no way to determine the body's "race." People of all colors were circulating through the exhibit, learning things about their bodies – all of our bodies. I marveled at the havoc we have wreaked for hundreds of years and many millions of people by placing such importance on that thin layer of skin and the pigment within it. For the rest of us is essentially the same. I'll say it again: race does not exist, except in people's minds. I considered putting the word "race" in quotation marks throughout this dissertation to make the point, but I thought it might detract from the other points that need to be made.

Racism is defined in various ways. In common parlance among European Americans, racism is often equated with prejudice based on race, which can be perpetrated on anyone by someone of another race. Antiracism activists, academics and others approaching the subject more analytically define racism as power plus privilege based on race. Graves describes racism as, "...the belief that groups [are] different in their very natures, and that these differences should be used to stratify society."¹⁰ Amoja Three Rivers distills the essence of racism simply to "power over."¹¹ By these definitions, racism can only be perpetrated by European Americans in this country, since we are in the dominant position. This power dynamic will be the basis of the definition and discussion of racism in this dissertation.

I have chosen primarily to use the terms “European American” and “African American” rather than “White” and “Black” to avoid inaccuracy and unnecessary polarization. No human being could be truly white or black in color and still be alive. More importantly, the colors white and black carry so many positive and negative associations, respectively, in our culture that using them to describe humans might well perpetuate racist thought. I recognize and respect others’ rights to call themselves “Black” or “White” to denote group membership, and I am hopeful that these usages within our common discourse will increasingly represent diversity and not polarity. I often use the inclusive acronym ALANA in lieu of the term “of color,” because the latter term implies that there are people who lack color – another inaccuracy. “White privilege,” “white supremacy” and “whiteness” are common terms that will be addressed in Chapter 2.

The terminology people use when talking about race can offer clues about their age, geographical origins, politics and identity development. My own use of language has evolved significantly as I have written this dissertation. Here is the progression of the revisions for one of my early chapter titles:

1. “White” Women in the Melting Pot
2. White Women in the Balance: How We Might Be the Fulcrum that Can Tip the Race Balance
3. White Women in the Balance: How We Might Carry the Weight that Can Tip the Race Scales

What I see in this evolution of my use of language is the development of my identity as a European American woman, beginning with passivity (during a time when I was not questioning the hegemonic goals of the melting pot metaphor), then moving through dominance (white women as the fulcrum – the center of everything!), to a non-committal suggestion of action toward a vague end. Ultimately I eliminated the discussion altogether.

In addition to the language of race and racism, this dissertation also addresses issues of social class. I have chosen to use the broad term “owning class” in some places to describe all those with more wealth than the middle class.

Dissertation Structure

The first half of this dissertation follows a progression from the introductory statements of rationale, methodology and terminology (Chapter 1), to a placement of this study within the larger context of whiteness in the United States (Chapter 2), to the autobiographical context for my own exploration of racial issues (Chapters 3 & 4). The second half of the dissertation illustrates my journey from a silent spectator of racial dynamics, to an emerging activist as an antiracist citizen and educator (Chapters 5-7). Chapter 8 concludes my story.

Between chapters I have written “Interludes” that provide opportunities for the reader to view the topics at hand through different lenses. Throughout my personal and political work exploring racial issues and tensions, I have often found it helpful to relax my effort at left brain analysis and allow my right brain to generate rhythms, images and tones that can reveal simple truths underlying the enormous complexity surrounding the

issue of race. For me, these interludes provide meditations that are helpful in renewing my spirit and commitment, and my hope is that they will serve a similar function for the reader.

INTERLUDE: IMMERSION

When you fall in love with someone new, you want to find out everything about that person. The newness of his/her qualities delights you. You voraciously ask questions about his/her life, trying to learn what elements have conspired to create this person you love. You delight in the discovery of newness, uniqueness, strange preferences and idiosyncrasies. You wonder, “What gifts will this person bring into my life?” and “By what blessing did this person come to me?” You try to be your best self with this person. What would the world be like if we could all encounter one another with this sense of discovery, of curiosity, of delight, of blessing?

CHAPTER 2: THE EUROPEAN AMERICAN NARRATIVE IN CONTEXT

In race-based American society, the white race is the standard against which all others are measured.... My people and I have been determining what others should do for centuries, and it's not a pattern I want to continue.

Frances Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege*

Because the ideology of White racial superiority is so deeply embedded in our culture, the process of "unlearning racism" is a journey we need to continue throughout our lives.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Lighting Candles in the Dark"

In this chapter I provide a framework for the ways in which race is currently discussed in academic and activist environments. Beginning with two high school stories, one from my youth and one from recent events, I illustrate the differentiated status of European American and ALANA people in the United States. After a description of how this dissertation fits into the current literature on race, I explain key theoretical components of racial analysis pertaining to European American narratives: white privilege, white supremacy, and white identity development.

Race IS the Issue

One day during my senior year of high school, I was called to the disciplinarian's office. I had been summoned there before to be reprimanded for my chronic tardiness to school, so I expected more of the same. That day, though, I was asked whether I had parked in the faculty lot. I had not, and I told the stern woman that I hadn't, and that I

never had. She then described a car with the license plate number, and asked if it belonged to my family. It did. She then asked me to stand there while she called my mother to discuss the matter with her. My mother confirmed that I had never driven that car to school. The administrator didn't believe either one of us, and was clearly frustrated that my mother's testimony was now limiting her ability to discipline me. I was outraged by her clear assumption that both my mother and I were lying, and I stormed through the school, leaving notes for my advisor and trusted teachers about the hypocritical system of "student support" in our school. I still have no idea how our car appeared in her records, and now that I've been a Dean of Students myself, I sympathize a bit with her dilemma. Still, she clearly hadn't believed me (or my mother), and we had both told the truth.

Contrast that event with the experience of another high school senior, Alex Colston. One day in 2000, the Essex Junction, Vermont, police department got a call from a woman who said that three teenage boys were engaged in a robbery on her property. She indicated that two were white, one black. A call was put out on the police radio and several squad cars began searching for the boys. The two European American teenagers had sped away in a car; the African American youth had fled on foot. The description of the latter reminded the officers of a young man they knew in town, Craig Colston. He was light-skinned with a tall Afro. The officers went to his house. He wasn't there, so they waited for him. In the process, they came across Craig's older brother Alex walking home on the bike path. Dark-skinned with close-cropped hair, Alex was alone, walking peacefully through his own neighborhood. Two police officers ran toward him, threw Alex on the ground and held a gun to his head. Alex had no idea why this was

occurring, but his parents had taught him to be polite to police officers in all circumstances, for his own protection. This paid off, since we know from similar incidents nationwide that an angry response, or even a physical action like reaching for his wallet, could have landed him in jail, the hospital, or worse.

As it turned out, no robbery had occurred. The report of a potential felony turned out to be a few kids trespassing in the woman's barn, and the police were called off the search. Alex was released without apology. No damage had been done to the woman's property, and no further action was taken by her or by the police. Craig Colston was away from home at the time of the incident. The trespassers were never apprehended.

In the process, a young African American member of our community learned that the police were more likely to hurt him than to protect him from harm. Alex learned that if any African American male is suspected of a crime, he, Alex, might be apprehended for it, regardless of whether he looked like the suspect. Will this young man ever feel that the police are employed on his behalf? That's very unlikely.

Alex's parents are prominent members of the community. His mother, Bev, runs the ALANA Center on the University of Vermont campus, supporting students and faculty of color to thrive at UVM. Alex's father, Hal, has won awards for his decades of commitment to creative community service and social entrepreneurship. Following this experience with the police, Hal and Bev contacted their lawyer, the ACLU, the Vermont Civil Rights Commission, and many of their African American friends. Their initial plan was to sue the police department for racially profiling their son and for the resulting damage. Their intention was to turn any money they received from the case back to the

community for education regarding issues of race. However, after discussing the case with many parties, including a meeting with Vermont Attorney General Bill Sorrell, the Colstons concluded that pursuing the case would cause an untenable backlash for Alex and their family. In short, they decided the fight would do more harm than good. Hal Colston says that Alex still shows signs of post-traumatic stress disorder from being accosted that day by the police. He is frightened by the presence of the police, and he struggles to find a fundamental sense of safety and stability in his life.¹

When I think back on the rage I experienced in my high school after being accused of a parking violation, and then I ponder the experience of Alex Colston at the same age, I feel sick, scared and outraged. The difference in scale between our stories and their consequences tells a story about race in the United States. Alex Colston and I were both falsely accused. I was accused privately and quietly by someone who ultimately had no power over me once my mother spoke on my behalf; Alex was dangerously and publicly accosted by two men whom taxpayers had hired to keep the community safe, and his parents had no opportunity to protect him. The injustice I experienced was a mere annoyance alongside the terror that Alex Colston experienced at the hands of police. My character had been called into question briefly; his life, both in the moment of the incident and in the life-long implications of this event, was and is on the line.

Reading about Race

Beginning in high school, I read works by African American writers that told compelling stories about race in this country. Maya Angelou, Richard Wright, Zora Neale

Hurston, Alice Walker, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison and many others offered windows into the dynamics of racism and power, along with vibrant depictions of human life in general. As a result, I believe I developed insight into aspects of African American identity before I consciously understood, or even considered, the European American experience.

When I commenced my current study of unlearning racism, I moved in my reading from ALANA authors to European American writers who focus on race. Whiteness studies is a relatively new field that was first introduced within the discipline of developmental psychology and then expanded into other disciplines in the 1980s. Peggy McIntosh's 1989 publication, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," is a brief and accessible article on white privilege that was widely disseminated, and it provided me with my first consideration of the subject.² From there I read research on whiteness, white privilege, and antiracist approaches to education.

Most compelling to me are the writers who address whiteness by telling their own stories – Smith, Berger, Frankenberg, Thompson, Braden, Rothenberg, Kendall and others.³ They reveal their own racial identity development and challenges, often sharing stories from their classrooms or antiracist activities. Most of the narratives written by European Americans are by Jews, working class people, and Southern women. Their voices have helped me examine my own life, drawing my experiences into dialogue with theirs to help me break through the seamless surface of whiteness.

While many of these narratives describe experiences of white privilege and supremacy, they rarely detail instances in which the author was a direct perpetrator of

racism. Some of the personal stories from my own life that I have uncovered through my writing about racism seem more harrowing than the ones I have heard and read from other European American writers. They are painful and embarrassing and difficult to reveal even to myself, let alone to my readers. But in setting off on this self-study, I knew that in order for my work to successfully result in learning and transformation, I would have to hold myself to candor and bold exploration. The methodology of scholarly personal narrative has become a vehicle for silenced voices to emerge powerfully in print.⁴ In my case, it is the shadow side of privilege that has found voice here.

White Privilege

As I was reading the poignant and clarifying short stories in Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks*,⁵ I became aware of my deep fatigue in observing all the white privilege around me. Hughes' depictions of European American actions and assumptions through the eyes and lives of his African American characters help make white privilege stand out in stark relief as I look around me. It's so pervasive that although I probably only recognize a small portion of it, white privilege still seems to just coat everything, like the insulation in my attic does. Between the floorboards in my attic is a fluffy, gray, loose cellulose that provides insulation to the rooms below. It's so soft that you almost can't feel it when you touch it, but it's everywhere, it fills every nook and cranny. If you look closely at it you can see parts of words; it is bits of newspaper with the meaning shredded out of it. As I walk down the street in Burlington, or walk through a home, store, library or school, I see white privilege this way – pervasive, soft, filled with

unreadable meaning, providing insulation and comfort most European American people aren't aware of. Most ALANA people and some European Americans see it, feel it, and know they're inhaling it. What's to be done? Even as I try to come to honest terms with my own portion of white privilege, I find it so pervasive in everyone around me that I don't know where to start in addressing it, and I don't know where to go to get away from it.

For the eleven years that I've lived in Vermont, I've envisioned myself remaining in my house and in my community for the rest of my life. But do I really want to live so completely surrounded by European American people, white privilege and the attendant ignorance? How can I do that and still develop my reason, my integrity, my skills of citizenship and my sense of justice? I think the only answer is to actively develop relationships with ALANA people and enlightened/evolved/aware and honestly-working-on-it European Americans. I need to develop my "base" of allies, as I learned in the Undoing Racism training offered by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.⁶ As my own white identity development moves forward and I become clearer about my own intentions, I think this process will become easier, although my introversion will remain a challenge as I meet new people and wish to build relationships with them.

White Supremacy

White supremacy is a term usually applied to the extreme attitudes of hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Yet the notion that European Americans are better than people in other groups is pervasive in our cultural imagery and societal practices. White supremacy

plays out in myriad ways: sportscasters describing European American players in terms of their intelligence and African American players in terms of their size;⁷ schools tracking ALANA students into low level courses and special education designations;⁸ the College Board throwing out SAT questions that ALANA students are more likely than their European American peers to answer correctly;⁹ and the unquestioned presence of an enormously disproportionate number of African Americans in our prisons, just to name a few examples.

White supremacy plays out in my daily personal interactions as well. For example, sometimes I get so sick of listening to European American men talk. So many of them talk, and talk, and talk, all the time presuming that I want to listen, that I'm interested in what they have to say, and even that I'm impressed with them. Maybe men of all races do this in patriarchal societies; perhaps I'm describing the plight of women everywhere. It's boring, sometimes aggravating, other times sickening, depending on the topic, my mood, and my wherewithal to shift the dynamic in a more equitable direction. This is a stereotype I now hold, and I know I'm painting with too broad a brush. In fact, I'm married to a quiet European American man whom I sometimes wish would speak more! And of course, sometimes European American men say very important and valuable things. What I'm really wishing for is a better balance, a give and take, a more conscious sense of dialogue that acknowledges parity of status and respect.

But to be honest, in the absence of European American men talking that way, I sometimes fill the gap and speak a lot myself. Recently I took a writing class that was about one third ALANA students and two-thirds European American. I was auditing the

class, not even enrolled, and still I dominated. I knew it, and before each class I counseled myself to listen more and speak less, but too often I spoke my mind. Why? Because I believed that what I had to say was valid and important. Because I was more confident than many of my younger classmates and therefore quicker to speak. Because I believed I had some particular wisdom to impart as a result of my age and experience. Because I had been groomed for success in classroom environments since before I entered kindergarten. In short, I dominated because I felt entitled to dominate. I was aware of it, I was trying to correct my behavior, and I failed to do so. I consumed more than my share of airtime.

As a student in that writing class, I possessed the moral framework for curbing my speech, but not the will or creativity to change the conversational dynamics. I didn't truly commit myself to engage in what Robert Nash calls the "moral conversation."¹⁰ I could have framed some probing questions to classmates, noted aloud to the class or privately to the instructors that the conversation seemed imbalanced, or simply kept my thoughts more often to myself. Simply observing and listening without comment would probably have been the biggest paradigm shift for me, and perhaps that would have allowed me a moment to get myself on a higher moral and spiritual path. Amoja Three Rivers counsels European American people: "Relax. Breathe. It's O.K. for you not to be in the center of everything you see."¹¹ If she felt the need to publish that statement in a book, I must not be the only one behaving this way. White supremacy places White people at the center of everything, and somewhat above, at the same time.

When I first wrote the paragraphs above, I mentioned that no one put up any resistance to my dominant conversational habits. But as I reflect further, I realize that there were people in the room who were silent, and most of them maintained a distance from me during breaks. Was this an expression of their resistance? I don't know, but it's worth thinking about. More importantly, I can't wait for someone else's resistance to alert me to the inappropriateness of my actions.

White Identity

Psychologist Janet Helms outlines a theory of white identity development in six statuses (which she initially called stages):

1. Contact – characterized by unconscious acceptance of a paradigm in which “normal” is defined by white culture and the associated privileges are taken for granted.
2. Disintegration – a status in which education or exposure calls into question the assumption of white centrality. This status is often accompanied by feelings of discomfort, guilt or confusion.
3. Reintegration – a retreat into avoidance or resentment toward ALANA people.
4. Pseudoindependence – an emerging understanding of the unfairness of racism and the advantaged position of European Americans within it. In this status, the European American might prefer contact with ALANA people over time spent with other European Americans.

5. Immersion/Emersion – characterized by an emerging analysis of whiteness and a desire to learn about the potential role of European Americans in dismantling racism.
6. Autonomy – a status in which the European American develops positive associations with her own identity and an ability to effectively engage in antiracist actions and authentic cross-racial relationships.¹²

These statuses are not intended to describe a linear progression. Instead, an individual can operate within any status (and more than one at the same time) when faced with a particular set of circumstances. In my own experience, the progression seems to be a spiral in which I return to the initial statuses when faced with a stimulus that draws upon unexamined or deeply embedded racial prejudices; but as I reflect on them, challenge my own assumptions and broaden my experience, I am able to move up the spiral toward Autonomy. I will refer to Helms' stages of white identity development in coming chapters.

INTERLUDE: THREE IMAGES

Americans and Their Mirrors

It's curious to me that both the ideas of double consciousness and the inability of European Americans to see their privilege are related to reflection. ALANA people are constantly forced to look at their racial identities, and European Americans can't see theirs. I am fascinated by what happens within the European American population when some of its members begin to see their whiteness in the mirror. It's like one of those optical illusions that you have to stare at a long time before the real image emerges. When a group of people is looking at one of those pictures together, someone suddenly says, "Oh, I see it! Cool!" and then the others start to get frustrated because they can't see the underlying image. A group of European Americans learning about white privilege engages in a similar process. As we begin to be able to see some aspects of our racial identities but not others, we need to share our angles of vision until we can all see ourselves within the context of whiteness. I would like to create one of those optical illusions and have the hidden image be a house of mirrors in which ALANA people are looking into mirrors that reflect back distorted images of themselves, and European American people look into mirrors that show them nothing.

Hope

This image came to me following a talk by James Banks about the curriculum and pedagogy of multicultural education in higher education.¹

Capitalism appears as a huge grey monolith, an unmarked edifice. Democracy is a much smaller but hefty, multicolored jewel. A diverse group of people, mostly of color, are in the shadows, holding the jewel on their shoulders, chipping away at the monolith, and cracks are beginning to emanate from the base.

Race Track

A third image came to me as I was reading O'Brien's, *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action*.² I imagine a cartoon consisting of two frames. In the first, four sprinters can be seen from the front preparing for a 400 meter race: a smiling white man, then a serious white woman, then a determined black woman, then an angry black man. They are in staggered lanes, with the white man first and the black man last. The second frame shows them from the back, and the white man is shown to be in the inside lane of the curve ahead, the opposite of the equitable arrangement.

CHAPTER 3: CLEANING OUT MY RACE CLOSET

In the minds of many I am angry, threatening, lazy, untrustworthy, shiftless, troubled, unmotivated, disgruntled, and aggressive. I bear the unique burden of being both Black and male and with that, the burden of being defined by society.... I am dangerous but only in my dreams. I dream with my eyes open.... Living dangerously is my state of being.... It is represented in my mere existence as a Black man in a world that was not designed with me in mind. Living dangerously means looking forward with a realistic eye, seeing what is actual and what is desired. It means living in this space, in this time, and working to influence change in my small corner of the world. Living dangerously means resisting the temptation of living life for self-gratification. It means sharing my limited resources with those who are not as fortunate as I or with those whom I compete against. Living dangerously means recognizing the impact of my existence and living my life accordingly. It means dreaming of the infinite possibilities and believing in their ability to come true.

Alvin Sturdivant, *On My Journey Now:
An African American Search for Direction,
Definition and Destiny in the Academy*

So we learned the dance that cripples the human spirit, step by step, we who were white and we who were colored, day by day, hour by hour, year by year until the movements were reflexes and made for the rest of our life without thinking. Alas, for many white children, they were movements made for the rest of their lives without feeling.

Lillian Smith, *Killers of the
Dream*

I've been trying to cleanse myself of racism ever since I was aware it was there. But as I navigate my psychic landscape, it appears that racism has grown deep roots within me. What would it take for me to entirely eradicate the racist messages that lie deep in my psyche? I wonder if I have ever met a European American who has done so, or who has avoided racism's influence to begin with.

This would be hard to know, since European Americans rarely talk about racism, especially in a self-reflexive way. I have heard African Americans refer to individual European Americans as free of racism. I wonder if they are defining racism as I am: The making of assumptions linking characteristics with a group of people based on their (perceived, constructed) race, and reducing their access to power as a result.

At one point during the Cold War, my mother convinced my father to have a bomb shelter built in our basement. She then stocked it with canned foods and other survival equipment. Approaching my “race closet” for this dissertation felt much the same as entering that bomb shelter. It was dark and moldy, and it smelled like doom. As I approached it, I knew I needed something that was there, but I was afraid of encountering other things that I didn’t want or need, frightening, haunting things that would shake me off of the whole endeavor. In entering my race closet, I knew my liberation, if I was to have it, would be hard-won.

And now we enter the most painful part of this narrative. As I have written and read my way through layers of racial prejudice, I have uncovered in myself the pattern that Alvin Sturdivant cites above: the worst of my stereotypes, prejudices and racist actions have been perpetrated on African American males. It was a story about an interaction with one of my students that emerged first, like the tip of an ancient bone dinging under a paleontologist’s spade. As I continued to reflect and to write, a bigger picture emerged, yielding the stories below. These

are painful incidents to relate; they constitute the deepest root of the racism I have absorbed and harbored over the years.

Two Boys and a Man

Twice in my life I have taught African American kids. The first opportunity occurred when I was an instructor at Nature's Classroom, a residential environmental education center for middle school students. Each week a new group of students came to us, and we explored the woods and pond, ate our meals together in the cafeteria, and entertained each other in the evenings. Most of our students came from New England, but one week we had a group of African American sixth graders from the Bronx. One evening before dinner, as the kids were getting settled at our bustling table, one of the boys swore in anger. I was standing right beside him, and I flew into a rage, directing him onto the porch. Shaking in anger, I yelled that he was never to speak to me like that again. He protested that he had been speaking to another student, not to me, but I persisted. *Yet I knew that he was telling the truth, and for a moment I realized that I had even known it when he first uttered the curse.* In retrospect, I believe I was shouting at that boy through a fog of racism; I was "keeping him in his place." I saw the moment in his eyes when he understood that he could not defend himself, and went silent. I exiled him to the porch for most of dinner, and then I let him come back in to eat. He had cussed at another kid like thousands before him, and I had somehow dipped into an old river of oppression, and doused him with it. It

was the heat of my response in proportion to the offense that was the clue. Up until that time I had rarely raised my voice to a student, even for more serious behavior. But in that moment, something unexpected came out of a deep place within me.

I might not have understood the underpinnings of that incident, had something similar not happened again. Years later, I was teaching English to ninth graders in an affluent community in New Hampshire. Our high school was in the midst of being celebrated as the New Hampshire High School of the Year. One of my students was African American, and he was the first person in the school's two-year history to have been "held back" to repeat ninth grade. I was no more successful in educating him than the other ninth grade English teacher who had taught him the year before, and he and I got into a power struggle one day. At the height of my frustration, I called his mother on my classroom telephone within earshot of my class, to describe his behavior. This kind of public humiliation constitutes teaching malpractice, to be sure, and I'm ashamed that I ever lost control over my behavior to that degree. But it wasn't until recently that I also realized that I had never done the same thing to a European American student, no matter how frustrated I became. I now think that as in the previous incident, I was playing out the horrifying and historic practice of putting an African American male in a powerless place.

Years after the incidents with these two young students, another event occurred that resonates for me with the same sinister sadness. After ten years as a

high school teacher and administrator, I had become a professional developer and consultant in schools. One summer I was co-facilitating a seminar on collaborative feedback practices for educators. We spent an intensive week at a conference center outside of Boston, carefully building our learning community so that the group would feel safe enough to offer each other substantive feedback on their work. There were about forty people in our group.

Over the course of the week, my co-facilitators and I were dismayed by the frequency with which participants arrived late, left early, and interrupted our work for various reasons. We made announcements and led discussions in an attempt to stem this tide, but the problem persisted. On the fourth day of our five-day course, James, an educator from Chicago, approached me and one of the other facilitators to explain that he had been fortunate to schedule an interview while he was in Boston at a graduate school he hoped to attend. It would mean that he would miss some of our seminar on the following day. To illustrate his plans, he held up a scrap of paper with the appointment written at the margin. My reaction was immediate. I sharply declared that our expectation was that participants would attend our seminar in its entirety and that the trust required to do our collaborative work could not be established in the group without a full commitment. My colleague muttered something milder, and James stalked away, angry and saying in a loud *sotto voce*, “No one’s going to look out for James but me.”

In the years following this event, I believed that the harshness of my response was merely a reflection of my frustration with the group as a whole. It didn't help that the appointment date that James had held up was written on a golf score sheet. I felt justified in calling him on what I believed to be his lack of commitment to our professional work.

Now I see this event differently. Prior to James approaching us to tell us about his appointment, many other people had taken liberties with our seminar schedule, often not informing us in advance of their intention to be absent. Several of them had probably been sightseeing in Boston, a common diversion for participants at larger professional conferences held in big cities. James was a large African American man. When he held up his golf card and showed us his appointment at the graduate school, I knew that the golf card was unrelated to his appointment, but I spontaneously used it as a justification for my action, in my own mind. I remember the split second in which I did that. It was the same split second as the moment when the African American boy at Nature's Classroom swore at his classmate. I am horrified to say it, but I know it to be true. I stood squarely within my white supremacy and my positional authority, and I lashed James with it. I've just realized this, ten years later, but I believe he knew it the moment it happened.

I have no similar stories to tell about ways I have oppressed African American women or people from any other population. I believe the prejudice I held and wielded in the incidents above is specific to African American males.

I'm so sorry and sickened by this. How can I know that I will not perpetrate this kind of racism on African American males in the future? This question forms the core of my rationale for writing this dissertation.

Seeing and Unseeing

In his bestseller, *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell looks carefully at the effects of first impressions.³ He describes a research tool developed by a group of psychologists called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). These tests, usually taken on a computer, require the test-taker to quickly categorize a series of words or images according to paired instructions. For instance, in the Race IAT developed at Harvard, the two categories given are "European American or Bad" and "African American or Good." The test-taker is to click on one or the other category as s/he is given a series of words or images. Then the categories are switched to "European American or Good" and "African American or Bad." What is measured is the speed at which the respondent makes the association, down to the millisecond. The data shows that the majority of European American respondents and half of black respondents more readily associate bad things with African Americans. This holds true no matter how many times they take the test. Mahzarin Banaji, one of the IAT researchers, explains the phenomenon: "You don't choose to make positive associations with the dominant group. But you are required to. All around you, that group is being paired with good things. You

open the newspaper and you turn on the television, and you can't escape it.”⁴ As a friend once said, we only see what's already on the back of our eyes.

I have a ready stock of stereotypes that come to the fore when I encounter new people. These generalities can make it difficult to see individuals in detail. I get distracted by a form of unease that doesn't arise when I'm with people who look more or less like me. What do “people like me” look like? They're dressed in middle-class American garb. They're casual (if they're polished-looking, my bias increases – I assume they're egotistical, superficial and/or materialistic, or that they know more about important things than I do). People who look like me are thirties-through-fifties. If they're beyond those ages on either side, bias again increases. People who look like me are European American, and they speak with my accent, more or less. If they sound different, bias. People who look like me move their bodies in more or less the same way I do. They stand at the same distance I do from other people, and they seek about the same amount of eye contact that I seek. They use a similar vocabulary, especially in colloquial expressions. What percentage of the human population fills this description? A very small one, but they're gathered in high concentration in my life.

ALANA people sometimes talk about how European Americans fail to look carefully enough to identify the differences among individuals of other ethnicities. If my own behavior is representative of that of other European Americans, it's a valid criticism. I miss visual cues in many other ways as well: aesthetic skills related to fashion, interior design, and landscaping are at the

bottom of my aptitude list. I have to concentrate to remember what kind of cars my husband and I drive. I can't remember names, and I'm equally inept at remembering faces. I can trace this particular disability's origin to the year when I was teaching 200 ninth graders physical education in a cycle of sixty at a time. Virtually all the girls (it seemed to me) were thin and blonde and had names like Christine, Kristen, Kirsten, Christy, Chrissy, and so on. I don't know which name was derived from which, but by the time the lineage arrived in my dance class, it had become a nightmare of nomenclature for me. There seemed to be multiples of all of these names, and my brain was fried by October. The only names I learned belonged to some of the boys and to any girl who had dark hair or a different body type than the thin, blonde norm (there were none with dark skin). Since then, I've suffered from an embarrassing inability to remember names in general, and the faces particularly of women who resemble the adult version of the Kristens I've described.

But beyond my individual impairment, I have uncovered broader patterns of unseeing that pertain to race. During the year that I was trying to sort out the Christies from Kirstens, a paraprofessional named Bobby was facilitating the arrival to our New Hampshire high school of four African American boys. These students had come up from New York City for a local church-sponsored sports event, and over the course of a long weekend, they had expressed a desire to stay in New Hampshire. Bobby quickly found them families to live with in town. At that time, there was an older African American student named Evan who had

grown up in the town, one of only two African American boys in our school. All of a sudden, kids he'd spent years with in school were stopping Evan in the hall to ask him about his life in New York. He was angered, injured and alienated by this new insight into the shallowness with which he was looked at but not seen in his hometown.

One afternoon the following year, an Asian senior girl came bursting into our faculty office, boiling mad because a guidance counselor had just called her the name of a younger Asian girl in the school. "There are only three Asian girls in this school, and she can't keep us straight? A *guidance counselor*??!!!" I was disgusted as well and I expressed my dismay, but since she had already confronted the woman, I took no action. Yet a few days later, as I jogged down the stairs to class, I called an Asian senior boy the name of a younger Asian boy in the school. It was the exact same story, and in the split second before I passed him, I saw the same expression on his face that I had seen on his classmate's earlier in the week. My stomach twisted, and I moved on with shame, but without apology (I'll return to the subject of silence in Chapter 6).

As I look at the paragraph above, I wish I could revise it to include more specific ethnic associations for these students than "Asian." I can't, and that's part of the problem. There is a website called *www.alllooksamer.com* where you can take a quiz to see how well you distinguish between Japanese, Korean and Chinese faces. A series of photo portraits appear, and you click on the ethnicity you think it belongs to. At the end you're given your score as compared to others.

I have taken the quiz three times over the course of a year, and each time I scored well below what even a random response would have yielded. Why? My daughter is Chinese born, of Han ethnic origin. I have now seen thousands of Chinese faces, in China and in this country, and examined the features of scores of Chinese children as I have learned about the various ethnicities in China. And still, I am no better at telling a Chinese person from a Japanese person from a Korean. For a year I went to lunch once a week with a Korean woman and a Japanese woman who were students in my ESL class. They looked very different, but I can't seem to apply characteristics of their looks to others of their nationality. If I see or hear a name from these countries, I can identify the origin, but visually, my eye and my brain just doesn't get it.

I was on the receiving end of an experience of being “unseen” when I was in high school. One of the quirks of my family was that my mother loved long hair, and encouraged all five of her daughters to grow our hair as long as possible. In my case, she laid down a rule that I could not cut my hair until age 16, by which time, she believed, I would understand its value and decide to keep it long. On my 16th birthday, my hair was almost to my knees. My sister took me to the hairdresser for the first time in my life, and I asked the stylist to cut off my yard of hair. She hedged, worried that I would regret such a drastic move, but in the end she assented to cutting my hair to shoulder length. As I walked through the school the next day, no one recognized me. There were no hellos from students or teachers in the halls. I had instantly become anonymous, and I realized that I had

been identified by my hair alone. I too was injured and alienated because I wasn't recognized. Yet while I may have experienced some of the same feelings as the other high school students I described above, I had merely vanished as an individual. I was not at the same time burdened by generalities lumping me together with dissimilar students.

The Color of Fear is a film that documents an intense discussion about racism between eight racially diverse men.⁵ I found the voices in the film powerful and challenging. I was most moved by the moment in the film when a Mexican-American and a Japanese-American man stood belly to belly and gazed into one another's faces. The Japanese-American man spoke eloquently about how he saw himself and his ancestors in the other man's face. Though these men did in fact have common ancestry (the ancestors of Native Mexicans having traveled across the Bering Strait from Asia), I wonder if any two people who looked into each other's faces deeply enough would discover the same thing.

I live in Vermont, and my contact with ALANA people is very limited. An African American resident of Burlington once said to me, "White people move to Vermont to be surrounded by White people." I was taken aback, and initially I rejected his contention, reminding myself that I consider Vermont's racial and cultural homogeneity to be a liability. But as I pondered his comment, I remembered that I had often told friends and family that I loved Vermont because here I feel surrounded by like-minded people, and everyone I vote for wins. I feel

that I understand and can endorse the culture around me. Would all of this be true, would I be so comfortable, if Vermont were more culturally diverse?

When I encounter racism within myself, when a racist thought crosses my mind, sometimes it seems to be a loose thought floating around in my brain, light in weight, trivial in a way. But at other times the racism seems to be coming from my chest – fear. It can throw me into despair and self-loathing, and it can seriously disrupt my ability to encounter another person on his/her own terms.

At times I have felt that divesting myself of racism has been like peeling away layers of an onion, and I have been dismayed by the number of layers that seem to be there. At other times it appears that I have peeled back the layers, only to let them fall back into place when I relax my effort. Now I wonder, how can I shred, dissolve, incinerate, rip off, TORCH all those goddamn layers? This onion stings my eyes, my hands, my heart, my soul. When I realize that I am testing the intelligence and education of my African American professor, or fearing the African American man walking toward me on the street, I fight an inner battle. I want the fight, the stinging, to cease. *But not until I've won.*

I have been thinking about the book, and especially the title, *Makes Me Wanna Holler* by Nathan McCall.⁶ McCall's autobiographical narrative details the conditions and challenges of his life and how he navigated them as a child and adolescent (a path leading to violence, substance abuse and incarceration) and ultimately as an adult (including marriage, fatherhood, and a career in journalism). This dissertation could have the same name as McCall's work. *His*

book made *me* wanna holler, and my story does too, for the same reasons, in a sense, even though McCall and I look at the oppressions of racism, classism and sexism from very different vantage points. It all makes me wanna holler. It scares me to write about these things in my dissertation, that so few will read and even fewer may challenge. What courage must it have taken for him to write his book, as he confesses to felonies and countless acts that he clearly thinks are wrong. I can't imagine the grit that man possesses. He is both a survivor and perpetrator of horror, emerging to tell his raw truth and to publish it for the world to know. McCall's book makes me furious, and it gives me both courage to write and reasons to do so.

INTERLUDE: CHI KUNG

I once attended a Chi Kung workshop in which the participants were told to find a partner and sit in chairs facing one another, almost knee to knee. Then we spent five minutes each looking at the other person while their eyes were closed. My partner was a European American man I didn't know. Right away the idea of having him look at me for five minutes without my seeing what part of me he was looking at or what his expression was in doing so was very uncomfortable for me (I can only imagine how it would have felt if my looks had ever been a source of abuse, ridicule or shame for me). So I looked at him first. What I discovered is that after a minute or so of just looking at his physical body with curiosity, I began to look *into* him. Soon I found myself feeling love for him, with basic, deep human compassion and recognition. After that it was much easier to have him look at me, because I realized that he would likely experience the same thing. In surveying the room afterward, it seemed to me that everyone had had a similar experience. So simple. So valuable. So scary. Now I wonder, how can I learn to look into each person I encounter until I love them? And how can I muster the courage to do so?

CHAPTER 4: WHITE AND WEALTHY: A SELF-STUDY

My dog love-a your dog, and your dog love-a my dog
My dog love-a your dog, and your dog love-a my dog
So why can't we sit under the apple tree
I can talk with you, and you can talk with me
We can be so happy, sitting under the apple tree.
Sweet Honey in the Rock, "Dog, Dog"

Life begets life. Energy creates energy. It is by spending oneself, that one becomes rich.

Sarah Bernhardt

In this chapter I include a chronological autobiography to provide the context for the more detailed discussion of race and class to follow. Tucked within the chronology is the description of a relationship that spanned more than thirty years, but that provides questions and themes that resonate throughout the rest of the work. This relationship with a woman who worked in our home when I was young, along with the travel experiences and mentors I go on to describe, have been crucial in providing windows and mirrors through which I can view the world and my rightful place in it.

My Birth Narrative

I was born into a wealthy European American family in Winnetka, Illinois, one of the most material-rich communities in the United States. Winnetka is a community known for its affluence, the quality of its schools, and its seamless

conservative culture. My parents ran a charitable household. They frequently took in stray animals and teenagers who were on the outs with their parents. My mother gave modestly to charity and volunteered in various civic organizations; my father gave extravagant gifts to family and friends. Still, I was raised with a fundamental rule of the wealthy: never touch the principal of your inheritance. Preserve the wealth and make it grow for future generations – of your own family.

I was the youngest of six children in a household filled with loud and lively political discourse. My father had a big personality. Hot tempered when younger, by the time I knew him he was jovial and generous, and enjoyed public speaking, singing, and wearing full kilt regalia to Scottish cultural events. As a young, promising businessman he could not hold a job because of his temper, and my oldest siblings, having grown up in fear of his volatility, modeled how to fly under the radar and avoid angering our parents. As a result of my father's employment problems, we were supported financially by his multimillionaire parents. During my childhood, my father worked at home managing business associations for professions he never held (e.g., Building Inspectors of America). He was obese and died at 57 of a heart attack. He lived an unfulfilled life in many ways, though I believe he enjoyed his family and friends.

My mother held the moral compass of our family. Some would say that she was trapped by tradition in an unhappy marriage; she would reply that she had taken a vow and was morally obligated to uphold it, especially for the children's sake. She attended secretarial school after college, then became an executive

secretary until her marriage. Her intellectual curiosity and talent yielded excellent self-education over time, circumscribed to some degree by the limitations of her life as a homemaker and the traditional gender roles of her generation. A life-long, outspoken Republican, my mother values civic participation and dialogue. I have happy and proud memories of visiting her at the polls where she volunteered on election days, checking in voters.⁷

The larger community in which I was raised valued seamless and polite manners and placed a high premium on concealing all of life's blemishes. Considerable money, time and effort was expended on looking good, sounding good, developing excellent credentials, and playing the myriad games of affluence. Our family didn't play them particularly fervently or well. My father's Cadillac didn't fit in our garage, so he pulled the garage door down onto its protruding taillights. I was heckled about that as a kid by the passing Catholic school kids as they walked to their school at the end of our block. We had numerous pets, and neighbors periodically called the police to find out if we had a kennel license. Our large family played in the yard in comparatively unkempt ways, relative to our surroundings; once a woman told me I was too old to be outside without a shirt on (I was eight at the time). When my father was in a coma following his stroke, a neighbor I'd never met stopped me in the yard to ask if he could trim our overgrown hedge. My sisters and I were never invited to participate in the cotillion circuit (a series of formal dances by which wealthy

young women are “presented to society”), presumably because of all of the shortcomings noted above, as well as an absence of appropriate bloodlines.

At school, I was the trusted student sent to do errands for the teacher, offering to help with paperwork during recess, etc. I loved most of my teachers and decided in second grade to become one, but I also occasionally used the privilege I cultivated to get away with misbehavior. The most serious offense was when I hid a disabled classmate’s orthopedic shoe in our fourth grade classroom. I had nothing against this student, but somehow on a lark I shoved her shoe into a cabinet. When it was discovered missing, it quickly became apparent that this was a serious offense. I was more afraid than sorry, so I hid behind my untarnished reputation and never confessed.

Overall, though, I was a “good kid,” following and upholding rules and doing my work. I was sometimes asked to help struggling classmates get their work done, and in junior high school I was nicknamed “Brain.” When I went on to my 3,800-student high school, I was surprised to find out that I wasn’t among the brightest. In fact, I was placed in the second-tier level of classes, a comeuppance that still comes to mind when I measure myself alongside my peers.

African Americans cleaned our home, and Latinos tended our lawn. I was taught not to thank waiters in expensive restaurants⁸ and to give away just enough money to be charitable but not to reduce the massive economic safety net in which I rested. At sixteen, when my father died, I discovered that I would inherit the principal of more than half a million dollars when I turned twenty-five, and

the interest in the meantime. Though virtually all of my friends would eventually inherit substantial estates, I was the first to face the opportunities and responsibilities of financial independence.

One result of being raised in affluence was that I learned to carry myself with authority. My family and community led me to believe that I had access to the riches of the land because that was my birthright, born of some mixture of God's approval and my forefathers' diligence and intelligence. We were expected to be grateful for our advantages, but not to seriously question their origins. Meritocracy was the unquestioned ideology of everyone who held sway in my environment. Thus, I have had to address two deficits in myself: ignorance and entitlement. Of the two, entitlement is by far the more intractable. As a result, I need help hearing the tone of my own voice, and I need to be shown what I don't know and what I perhaps am unable to know.

In a nutshell, I was raised in a position of power and privilege and I was taught in a wide variety of ways to maintain that position. From strategies for preserving my economic capital, to how to groom and present myself physically, to layers of protocol about how to engage in social and civic life, to where and how to travel and behave in public, to the vocabulary and timbre of my voice – all this information contributed to the cultural capital I had amassed by the time I left home at eighteen.

Within the meticulously landscaped environment of Winnetka, however, my family was somewhat different. My mother, particularly, was unpretentious

and welcoming. When my father died and I graduated from high school, my mother chose to move to a farm in New Hampshire where she easily fit into the much more casual, middle- and working-class environment of her new neighbors. I traveled East with her, and similarly took refuge in the more casual existence in New England. But I've jumped ahead; it's time to go back.

Gussie

Augusta Sumrall was raised in Quitman, Mississippi. She came to Chicago and worked for our family for more than fifteen years. Much of that time she lived in our home, in a "maid's room" above the kitchen. As a child I knew that Gussie⁹ was kind and hard working, that she had a quiet voice and an infectious laugh, and that she exuded competence in the kitchen. I knew that when she spoke with us (and especially with my father) outside of the kitchen, she looked down and said "ma'am" and "sir." I knew that she loved baseball, and that when my mother occasionally invited her into the living room to watch a game, Gussie would always refuse the offer of a chair and sit on the floor instead. I liked to sit on the floor with her.

In considering her life, I had my first experience of looking inside "otherness." I remember asking Gussie why she came to our house in a nice outfit that she immediately changed out of when she arrived. She was raised in the South and was not inclined to discuss issues of race and class directly, but she explained to me that travel clothes were different than work clothes. Later, when I

decided to travel to Chicago using the same route that Gussie followed, I found myself on trains and busses with many women who worked in the homes of my neighbors. I saw their fatigue, thought about the homes they were returning to, and began to think about the implications of this domestic work on the families and health of these women.

After I graduated from college, I traveled around the country and went to visit Gussie at her home in Quitman, Mississippi. She had told me that if I couldn't find her home, anyone in town could tell me where she lived. I couldn't follow her directions, so I stopped in at the police station to ask for clarification. The European American officer at the desk asked me who it was that I was looking for. When I gave him the name, his face clouded over. "Black?" he asked. "Yes." He jerked his head toward the African American officer behind him. "I'll take you over there," he said.

As I walked through Gussie's house, I found her walls covered with pictures of my family. They were established there – not posted hastily for my arrival. As I met her brother and extended family, every one shared a story from my childhood, many of which my own relatives could not have recounted. Even though my sisters invited Gussie to their weddings as a member of our family, it had never occurred to me that we were also members of hers.¹⁰

Gussie raised her niece for a time and never had children of her own. My five siblings and I received immeasurable nurturance from her. I now know that many African American women of her generation who cared for European

American children (often by living in their homes) were not able, due to their economic circumstances and restricted choices, to raise their own families. Gussie always cooked and served meals in our home on major holidays, and it amused my father to ring a bell at the table to summon her. Her niece sometimes came to help her with those big meals. What did they think of those days? How did they feel? What did they talk about on their way home? How and when did they celebrate the holidays themselves? These questions fill my mind now, but at the time they registered only as a vague discomfort with the situation.

When Gussie died about ten years after my visit, her niece sent my sister a copy of Gussie's high school valedictory speech. My mother didn't believe that she had written it, because she didn't think she could have. I feel sure that she wrote it. Now I have many questions about Gussie's life. What was her childhood like? What happened in her life after she graduated from high school? How would her life and opportunities have been different if she had been male? What was her perception of my family? How did she transcend the injustices of race and class and decide to love us? What did the rest of her family think, as she placed pictures of us all over her home? Everyone in Quitman treated me with kindness and generosity. When Gussie brought me to church with her on Sunday morning, she gave me a quarter for the basket and wouldn't allow me to use my own money, though she must have known that I could have dropped in a hundred dollars without hardship. The mixture of generosity and honor with which she addressed

that situation and so many others was humbling to me. I wonder, now, what our relationship cost her. The lyrics of Sweet Honey in the Rock provide a window:

Biting her lip and lowering her eyes
To make sure there's food on the table
What do you think would be her surprise
If the world were as willing as she's able?

(Sweet Honey in the Rock, *Breaths* album)

Until recently, my relationship with Gussie was the closest I'd ever had with an African American. With the exception of a few brief urban forays, I have spent my entire life in predominantly European American environments. Had it not been for my relationship with Gussie, I would not have had a conversation with an African American until after I graduated from high school; ironically, my opportunity to know her was the direct result of our economic disparity.

Years later I considered my relationship with Gussie from a new vantage point. I was visiting the new boyfriend of my closest friend from college. He was African American and had grown up in the Chicago area as well. When I told him the name of my hometown he said, "My mom worked for some families there." We looked at each other for a moment, and my gaze fell. I couldn't figure out where to go from there. After an awkward moment, someone changed the subject, and we found our way to somewhat more comfortable ground, missing an opportunity to learn more, to build a bridge, or simply to hear a story we'd never heard before.

In their study of people "leading lives of commitment in a complex world," the authors of *Common Fire* tell the story of an African American man

whose mother cared for the children of a troubled European American family. He suffered in anger at his mother's absence, but later when he attended a predominantly white college he heard another side of the story. Some of his classmates told him how important their "nannies" had been to them under circumstances of their own parents' emotional absence. Their stories enraged him, but they also gave him insight. As he considered anew that European American family of his youth, "at great cost, his network of belonging grew larger."¹¹ Through an act of will, he engaged in what Belenky¹² terms "connected knowing," which "requires one not only to compose an image of the other's world but to experience the feelings of living in that world."¹³ By degrees, over many years, I have felt facets of the complex emotions that must have made up Gussie's life.

Alternative Narratives

My high school American Studies teachers taught me about the origins of the American Dream and about "manifest destiny." They provided a critical analysis of Columbus' mission and its aftermath. They showed a film called "What If the Dream Comes True?" critiquing the high-consumption lifestyle of "successful" Americans. We read African American literature and took a field trip to a theater in Chicago to see a production of *Native Son*.¹⁴ The set, a huge white jungle gym against a black backdrop, and the Black protagonist moving around within it, is seared into my memory. As I took in this education, I began to feel

uncomfortable with the opulence of my affluent surroundings, coupled with what appeared to be intolerance for people who looked or acted differently than we did. I wanted to break out of the shelter of wealth and homogeneity that had separated me from the rest of the world.

Following my junior year of high school, I began to have contact with the world beyond my community. In the summer before my senior year, a friend and I joined a package tour of the capitals of Europe. My mother was recovering from my father's death, and my friend's parents were in deep conflict. It was time for both of us to leave home for a while, and this was the solution our families came up with. The first lesson of our trip occurred when we arrived at O'Hare Airport in Chicago. An African American skycap loaded our bags in a cart and took them to the check-in counter. After he unloaded them he waited, and my friend's mother, who had brought us there, did nothing. "Thank you, Ma'am," the skycap said, repeating the phrase a few times with increasing volume. She was fiddling with her ticket, pretending not to hear. Finally my friend said, "Mom, aren't we supposed to give him some money?" "Oh," she said in mock confusion, and held out a bill. My friend apologized to him.

When we arrived in New York to meet up with our tour group, we found that we were the only people in it who weren't from Texas. Thus, over the next three weeks, racing through cities, museums, cathedrals and hotels, we learned more about Texas than anything European. I also encountered more drugs, alcohol and sexual behavior than I had known before, though still only as an

observer. One of our roommates claimed she had a miscarriage in our hotel bathroom, I saw homeless people for the first time in Amsterdam, and I heard some surprising social and political perspectives from my compatriots. By the end of it, the genie was out of the bottle, and Winnetka would never look the same again.

Rita

I was very fortunate to have a mentor in my senior year of high school who helped me begin to look at my environment and understand it in a larger context. Rita Wonders was a European American ex-nun who was raised in poverty in Georgia and came to our community to open the eyes of affluent kids. I found my way into her youth group despite the fact that I wasn't Catholic.

I was getting tired of high school, so I arranged an internship in which I worked with Rita three mornings a week for credit. One day she said, "Take me on a tour of Winnetka and tell me about it." She asked me questions like, "When the woman who works for your family is sick and she can't come to work, does she still get paid?" I didn't know the answers to many of her questions, but they began to create scaffolding for my political awakening.

One day, Rita said, "Let's go see Chicago." That was a novelty for me, though we only lived twelve miles away. I had gone to the occasional show or restaurant there, but I'd never been in any residential or non-commercial areas. Rita suggested that we get on the "El" – the elevated train – and ride to the end of

the line. We sat there looking out the windows and rode all the way to the South Side of Chicago and back. As we rattled past people's home, often just feet away from their kitchens and bedrooms, I was amazed to discover the diversity of lifestyles that existed within a few miles of one another. As we moved from stop to stop, the train population shifted from European American to African American and back again. Rita and I talked about what we saw and how we felt about it on the way home. She held up the mirror, lovingly and relentlessly.

Rita took me to work in a soup kitchen in Chicago and to Appalachia to build homes for the economically disadvantaged. There I learned that people without economic resources are often sharply politically astute, that deep friendships can be formed across class lines, and that happiness has little connection with material wealth. The family I stayed with in Appalachia opened their hearts to me in a way that sustains me to this day. After these experiences, I took a volunteer job working on a crisis line in Chicago. There I worked beside a wide array of people, and spoke to people who were enduring every manner of human suffering. I was trained to listen with an open mind, and as I did so, images of life beyond my own experience further expanded my thinking and commitment.

Rita also spoke to me of contemporary prophets, in the same way that Greenleaf speaks of them.¹⁵ During this period I was deeply religious, and I saw everything in terms of God and faith, including my privilege and the struggles of the people around me. Rita and others had introduced me to liberation theology,

and my faith fed my boiling sense of injustice. Later I understood that Rita was herself a prophet.

Through Rita's influence, followed by other talented educators of various kinds, I began to articulate my own values. The first time I voted in a presidential election, still under the influence of my mother's considerable persuasion, I voted for Ronald Reagan. The second time, I voted for Jesse Jackson. I underwent what Helms calls the Disintegration stage of white racial identity development on a major scale, recognizing the injustices of institutional classism and racism and seeking to redefine my place in the world. Through all of this I learned, as one of Beverly Daniel Tatum's students did, that I wasn't evil because I was rich, European American, or any other one of my characteristics. I just had to take responsibility.¹⁶

Playing at Intimacy

When I didn't get into the only college I wanted to attend, I decided to take a year off after high school. I spent the fall working at two churches running youth programs. Then in January I went to Perugia, Italy for a semester of study abroad. Once again, I didn't know what I was getting into. I hadn't yet attended college, but all the other students in the program were in their junior year. They were all art majors; somehow I didn't realize that I had enrolled in an art program (I hadn't taken an art class since junior high school). I arrived in Italy during a time when men from all over the Middle East were taking refuge there from

compulsory military service at home. There were fourteen men to each woman in Perugia that year, and American hostages were being held in Iran.

I had two light-hearted dating relationships while I was there. The first was with a Nigerian who called himself Steve in Italy and Akinade Ainnah at home. We met in the disco and our relationship mostly consisted of dancing and laughing a lot. When he picked me up at my *pensione* one day, my *padrona* screamed when she opened the door. We laughed at that too; apparently she'd never seen an African before. Upon his return from a visit home, Steve brought me gifts from Nigeria – leather slippers and a travel pouch to wear around my neck. When his tenure in Italy was over, we agreed that our friendship would end there, and we didn't stay in contact.

After that I dated an Italian man for a while. He also was easy to be with and we mostly walked back and forth on the main street and had tea in bars. Once when I was mad at him and frustrated that I couldn't effectively yell at him in Italian he said, "So yell at me in English. I'll get the general idea." I did, and we both ended up laughing. He learned some new expressions in English that day.

Looking back on both of these relationships, neither would have happened for me here in the U.S. My transient status in Italy kept everything light and experimental. The interracial aspect of my first alliance made things more interesting, but not more weighty. The translingual aspect of the second was the same way. We were young, learning about people and relationships and having fun. If I'd been here, the cultural/racial/language bridges would have been harder

to cross. They would have carried layers of meanings, family resistance, and heavy questions about implications for the long term. At that time in my life, I didn't have the strength of identity or the political analysis to push against my own culture in those ways. Living abroad, none of that mattered.

Wealth

During a course I took in graduate school on controversial issues, the instructor asked us to get into small groups and discuss the most powerful political acts of our lives. Some people remembered demonstrations and rallies; others talked about how they raised their children and the careers they had chosen. It took me a few minutes to realize that the most politically powerful moment of my life was on December 23rd, 1986, three months after I'd turned 25. That was the day I gave away my half-million dollar inheritance.

When I was 16 my father died. As my grief abated, I found that I suddenly had a great deal of control over my life, including my financial life. My five older siblings had all established their own lives, and my mother was putting together the pieces of her own. I was blessed with friends and teachers who provided support and advice, but most importantly, they offered views of the world and of justice that were fundamentally different than my family and community had provided up until that time.

When I graduated from college, I went to Israel to learn about Judaism and community living on a kibbutz. During the six months I lived there, I had a very

deep experience of being valued for my work and neighborliness. I started out working in the community kitchen cutting piles of vegetables. I went on to work in the enormous laundry facility, followed by a stint on the night shift in a plastics factory. Finally I was placed in my dream job working six hours a day picking avocados (*kibbutzniks* worked slightly more, but workaholism was discouraged lest it upset the egalitarian balance of labor), and for that I was given everything I needed to live happily, including education and health care. Money wasn't used on the kibbutz, so for that period I felt a very direct relationship between my work and my sustenance.

When I returned from Israel, I began my teaching career. I took a job in Cambridge as an ESL teacher of adult classes, and I supplemented my paid work with a volunteer position teaching ESL to a group of Haitian immigrants. After four or five months of weekly classes with the Haitian group, we became attached to each other. My mother gave me money to buy warm socks and mittens for my students and their children. My students brought me fried plantains after I had called them bananas during our field trip to the grocery store. Our last night of class was several days before Christmas, and we had been locked out of the community building which housed our class. As we stood in the snowy street, awkwardly saying goodbye without the closure any of us had planned, there was a buzz among the group. From behind a car, one of the men brought two large, wrapped gifts. My students told me that they had brought me Christmas presents. The first was a new warm wool coat, and the second was a framed print of an

American farmhouse. I was humbled to silence. For weeks I had noticed that my students had been handing each other dollar bills, and I had imagined that they were helping each other out financially. They had communicated to me some of their struggles, including various racist incidents that they were experiencing at the factory where they worked, and I knew how strained they were financially. Now I realized that they had sacrificed much needed resources to express respect and affection for their teacher. I think often of my students from that class and continue to be fed and humbled by their generosity. Like the families in Appalachia who shared their homes with me, my students, who had fled poverty and persecution in Haiti only to encounter related forms of oppression here, shared what they had with me.

One day after I taught an ESL class, I sat in a café in Harvard Square by myself, watching a series of homeless people making a circuit of the payphone banks, checking for change. I folded up some five-dollar bills and stuffed them into the change compartments of a few phones. I watched for a while through the café window but didn't see anyone find the money. I was playing with the boundaries around money. Though five dollars might constitute a significant sum of money to someone who had none, at the time I was thinking more about creating a sense of surprise and new possibilities about what was possible with money. Humor was one of the ways I loosened my grip on material wealth.

Now I was ready to handle my inheritance in a new way. During the period in which I was teaching ESL, I became a war tax resister, withholding the

portion of my taxes that would be allocated to the military and donating that money to peace and social justice groups, and I joined a network of other people who had made the same decision. At one point, I traveled back to Appalachia to join a rally of support for a man I knew who had resisted his war taxes. The IRS was auctioning his farm, and people from several states gathered to witness his protest. A non-profit peace group bought the farm for the starting price at the auction (with the intention of renting it back to him indefinitely for a dollar a year); no one else present would bid. This event offered me the opportunity to observe strategic social activism in practice, and also to meet Peace Pilgrim, a woman in her sixties who was walking coast to coast bearing a message of peace.

After that trip I set to work learning about my inheritance. I went to the public library in Dover, New Hampshire, where my mother was living, and I asked the reference librarian to help me find information about giving away money. She had never been asked the question before, and she got excited about it. The two of us spent several hours bumping into each other and finding bits of information. During our search we came up with the name of the Haymarket People's Fund, a social change fund in Boston that also conducts conferences for progressive people with inherited wealth to talk about money issues.

Soon I was sitting in Haymarket's office, laughing and crying as I read through a book entitled *Robin Hood Was Right*.¹⁷ I had found my niche! Here I was among wealthy people who felt it was right to redistribute part of their resources. I immediately bought five copies and sent them to all the people I knew

who had money and an active social consciousness. Within months I was doing talks at Wesleyan and Harvard to educate college students about Haymarket. I had no activist background and the political and alternative investment realms were completely new to me. It was a big romance!

I attended my first Haymarket donors' conference,¹⁸ and I was eager to get on with the task of giving away my money. When I introduced myself at my first workshop, I shared my goal. Immediately the introductions stopped, and people started expressing their opinions that giving away principal was irresponsible and dangerous. I was shocked. I had thought we were there to discuss how to give away money, not whether to do it. But one of the workshop leaders approached me afterwards and let me know that her thinking was similar to my own.

At my next Haymarket conference, during an introductory icebreaker designed to help us identify commonalities within the group, I stood up and asked whether there were other people there who had considered giving their inheritances away. To my surprise and relief, several people stood up with me. We arranged to meet during the next break, and a few hours later, four of us climbed to the top of a grassy hill and stretched out in the sun to plan our money revolution. We asked each other what we wanted out of life and discussed our respective political strategies for changing the world.

We delighted so much in each other's company that we arranged to meet as an ongoing support group every month; our primary purpose was to discuss the

whys and wherefores of giving away our fortunes. We talked about how we had each come to the conclusion that many of the world's problems were connected to the vast inequities in the distribution of the world's resources. Then we affectionately named ourselves the Class Suicide Support Group.

Every month for two years, the four of us met to talk about our money. Our critical analysis and sense of security grew with each meeting. Somewhere along the way the questions came up: "Haven't other people given away their fortunes? What happened to them? What advice do they have for us?" We decided to ask them ourselves.

Christopher Mogil and I set up the first interviews and heard the first stories. They were, without exception, passionate. Many of the interviews were done on the phone, with Christopher and me listening on separate extensions in separate rooms. After we were finished, we would whoop and meet each other in the hallway to share our wonder at the wisdom and power we had just encountered in our interviewees. Here were people with courage, vision, and frequently humor, thinking about the effects of their actions and making powerful moves toward justice. They had various amounts of money, ranging from \$150,000 to \$80 million, and had given away varying amounts, from 20 to 100 percent, but all of them had decided that they had more than enough. Each one had carefully considered how their money could make the most positive impact on the world, and their methods and strategies for giving were creative and varied.

Forty interviews later (including some with public figures like Ben Cohen and Ram Dass), Christopher and his partner, Anne, collected the interviews in a book called *We Gave Away A Fortune*.¹⁹ They found that not one of the forty people interviewed regretted having given away their money. Most had come to the decision through a process that included traveling to less affluent places, and most described their action as a powerful departure from their background and training.

Some of our interviewees were very moved as they told their stories. Some spoke on condition of extreme anonymity, fearful of being harassed for money or rejected by their friends, colleagues and neighbors of different class backgrounds. Some were still struggling fiercely with the question of how much they should give or keep. When we asked one bi-millionaire why he had chosen to give one million away and keep the other, he replied, “One million seemed like enough.” As we questioned him further, it became clear that his measure of security included a safety cushion of that size. It seemed like much more than enough to me, but his value system and life circumstances landed him there.

One by one, three out of four members of our support group gave parts of our fortunes away (the fourth had her money tied up in family land that was still in use by relatives). The group had formed when I was 23, and I knew that at age 25 I would gain full control over the principal of my inheritance. I requested that the stocks be sent to me directly, and in mid-December of 1986 I received a large package of colorful stock certificates in the mail. I laid them out on my mother’s

kitchen table and began to research the companies that I had been earning interest from. They produced a number of things that I objected to, including nuclear weapons, cigarettes, and toxic pesticides that had been banned in the U. S. but were still being sold to developing nations. I made arrangements to give the stock directly to the Funding Exchange, a national fund based in New York that directs money to groups working toward social change.

On December 23rd it was raining in New Hampshire as I drove to the EF Hutton office to transfer the stocks to the Funding Exchange. The staff was expecting me, and we sat in the brightly lit office and ate Christmas candy as we filled out forms. A man walked in and I said, “You know what, this is a major event in my life, and to you guys it’s business as usual!” He looked down, saw the stack of stock certificates and said, “I don’t know what you’re doing, but it’s not normal business here to have a stack of stock certificates like that on our desks.” At one point I had to get something notarized, and the notary at the bank next door asked me to repeat a statement swearing that I was taking this action of my own free will. I laughed and said, “I swear!”

When the paperwork was complete and I stepped out onto the street, I felt my heart beating against my chest. I started to cry and laugh in the cold rain. It felt really clean, so simple. Although I was happy, I thought, “I’m lonely. I wish I had done this with someone.” Then immediately I thought, “No, it’s good that I did it alone, because it is a very individual act. Ultimately, I am alone in this decision. It’s my story.” I ran across the street to the Salvation Army bucket and

looked at the men ringing their bells in the downpour. I emptied my wallet into their bucket, thanked them for their work, and then ran to a pay phone and called my support group buddies to let them know I'd taken the plunge.

More than 20 years later I can see the power generated by my action. The money itself has allowed environmentalists, youth, and people doing antiracism efforts to do a wide range of work that otherwise would have been delayed or more difficult to accomplish. I gained fundraising skills as a result of my research that I have been able to contribute to additional social change efforts. I learned skills of social activism from my support group, and together we provided a model for other support groups and individuals contemplating similar actions. I and others in the group have appeared on radio (interviewed by Studs Terkel)²⁰ and television talk shows (including "Oprah")²¹ and have been interviewed by magazines and newspapers. We have chosen to make our stories public in order to support others who might tentatively be thinking outside the capitalist box about their wealth.

Various people along the way have questioned my decision. In considering the constant stream of "what if" catastrophe scenarios that have been posed to me by strangers and family members alike, I have learned that security comes more from the dedication of one's community than from material prosperity. But more powerful than all of these is the knowledge that if I act clearly and directly from my values, my life and the lives of those around me will be enriched. I couldn't have come to my decision just by thinking about it – I had

to travel by myself, observe people, get support from friends, and pay attention to the earth. I noticed unhappiness with the imbalanced state of the world, and drew my conclusions – that I am part of that imbalance, but I can choose to shift the balance a little bit by my own actions.

Five years after I redistributed my inheritance, I attended a weekend workshop offered by Equity Institute entitled “Dismantling Classism.” It was designed for people with inherited wealth to take a careful look at classism within their lives. A number of people I knew from progressive donor networks were there, but the workshop leaders were new to me. They began with oppression theory and asked us all to fill out a chart that listed many identity markers – gender, religion, class, race, sexual orientation, etc. For each category, we checked either the dominant column or the target column, then we reflected on how it felt to be a member of a dominant group in some instances, and in the target group in others. In my case, I found myself in the dominant group by every measure except gender. As a middle-class, gentile, heterosexual who is currently able-bodied and of European origin, all kinds of cards are stacked in my favor. My target status as a female has indeed provided challenges in my life, but for the most part I have been able to regain lost ground by exercising the privilege inherent in my other identities. One of our presenters was a young, African American, Jewish, lesbian woman from a working-class background. She spoke articulately from her vantage point about her experience with multiple targeted identities (her only dominant identity marker was able-bodied). I listened to her

carefully and tried to understand her experience. The distance between us seemed great, but we were in the room together, talking and listening. We had made the commitment to “sit under the apple tree” to hear each other’s stories.

The most memorable moment in that weekend for me occurred just before dinner at the end of the first day. The presenters stopped the proceedings and told us they would like to give us some feedback as a group. In all of their years leading equity trainings, they said, they had never worked with such a demanding group before. At every turn, members of our group had made suggestions for changes in the agenda, food, setting, pacing, etc. They felt their leadership choices were being scrutinized and challenged in an unprecedented way, and they attributed this to our owning class backgrounds. The reaction from the group was thoughtful but unapologetic. Wasn’t it good to speak up about one’s needs? Offer one’s point of view? Try to make things better? Participate? Most of the participants were women. Wasn’t it great that we were empowered? The workshop leaders seemed partly defensive, partly deflated, but still committed to helping us understand. There’s a difference between empowerment and entitlement, they said, and we would all need to help each other see that difference.

At the time that this conversation took place, I had a suggestion for the workshop leaders already jotted on my note pad that I had planned to mention during our next meal. Did I really need to make this suggestion, or should I let it go? It seemed important to me, but so did their point. Nonetheless I approached

one of the leaders in the buffet line and told her I had a suggestion, and asked her if she'd rather that I save it for later. She looked at me in weary disbelief, and said, "Yes, later." I never raised the issue. It took me years to understand their point about entitlement. Today I am embarrassed by my behavior in the buffet line, and I am grateful for the hard-working leaders who stuck with us throughout that weekend.

In interviewing people about their attitudes regarding class, bell hooks discovered that wealthy individuals often did not see themselves as rich.²² They situated their wealth in relationship to those who had more, but not those who had less. When I attended Haymarket People's Fund donor conferences, participants filled out anonymous questionnaires describing their wealth and giving patterns. When this data was posted, year after year it was revealed that the wealthiest respondents gave away the smallest proportion of their wealth. In workshops I led on developing non-material security, these ultra-wealthy participants expressed the greatest isolation and fear. Their fears ranged from being harassed by people who wanted money, to being judged and ostracized by people who were hostile to the rich, to being robbed or kidnapped and held hostage.

Recently I was part of a three-person story in *People Magazine* about individuals who have given away substantial portions of their wealth.²³ One of the people in the story, Pilar Gonzales, had begun giving away money shortly after her new husband died of heatstroke on a construction site. She continued giving half her income away, even when an arthritic hip reduced her income to \$16,000 a

year. She gets up at 6 a.m. to hand out hats, gloves, sandwiches and coffee to day laborers as they wait for work, then continues on through her day as a consultant with non-profits to build economic infrastructure for people living in poverty. Pilar was raised in a migrant farm worker's family. Her actions and commitment eclipse my own, though her financial contribution is somewhat limited by her circumstances. We enjoyed each other very much when we met on the phone the day after the article was published. One of the things she said was that she had liberated herself by developing compassion for rich people. "Having compassion for poor people is a no-brainer," she said. "But developing compassion for rich people has been a real growth area for me."²⁴ I was touched by her words and her commitment.

Sometimes when I'm doing errands, I look at the clerks, custodians, food service workers, road construction crews I see, and I think, "Who are these people? Where do they live? Why don't I know any of them at all?" The thought comes to me often, and it disturbs me, because then I feel as though I'm on the fringe of things, as though all of these people are the mainstream, and I'm living an alternate life.

Sometimes I feel separated by my education. Even as I write this dissertation, I am aware of layers of privilege that have made this advanced degree possible for me. I was able to pay for my first two degrees out of pocket, even as an undergraduate writing the checks myself, and only began to require financial aid as a doctoral student. In an article entitled, "Scaling the Ivory Tower:

How Activists are Trying to Diversify the Academy and Why Progress is Slow,” Jacobson cites, among other factors, the daunting debt already shouldered by many African American undergraduates that leaves them unlikely to attend graduate school.²⁵

The community I was raised in and the high school I attended undoubtedly helped me gain admittance to my undergraduate alma mater, Wesleyan University. After my graduation, I became an alumna interviewer and subsequently interviewed a steady stream of candidates who were better qualified and more intellectually talented than I am, but who ultimately didn’t get into Wesleyan in spite of my recommendation. Though the entire undergraduate admissions pool is more competitive now than it was when I was applying, it’s likely that my background contributed to my acceptance by Wesleyan. My graduate college acceptances might well have been influenced by the cache of my Wesleyan degree, and Wesleyan’s presence on my resume may also have helped me with job applications.

When I see a statistic about the average American income and I see that mine now falls below the average, and I drive through new developments of enormous houses with three-car garages, again I wonder where I stand. Even though I consciously chose my financial status, I am now subject to the pervasive financial stress of the American middle class of this generation. Yet though I changed my economic situation by giving away my money, there are aspects of privilege from my affluent beginnings that I retain. My education, my health, my

social networks, my cultural capital – all these provide me with layers of security that someone from a less privileged background can't take for granted.

Through my relationships with Gussie, Rita, my American Studies teachers, and my financial activism support group, I gradually developed a political analysis of the power structure at work in our country. In my 20s, my focus was primarily on economic justice. Now, as I look more closely at racial issues, I see that I can apply some of the same strategies for personal growth and political activism that I employed back then. Justice demands that those in the dominant role share power. To that end, I gave away my inheritance, but I can't give away a portion of my racial identification. In the following chapters I will explore strategies for addressing racism personally and institutionally, drawing in part from my experiences in pursuit of economic justice.

INTERLUDE: ADDIE GRAY

A young woman enters from the back of the stage in a leotard and leg warmers. She walks to the front of the stage, where there is a bench and a chair. She explains that she has been involved in a movement study, and demonstrates her process. By freeing various joints in her body and expanding the range of motion there, she has discovered characters from the resulting movement patterns in her body. One is a gangly teenaged boy who throws himself across the bench to recline completely. He's funny, but she wants to develop a female character, so she shakes the teenager out of her body and decides to freeze some joints, limiting her movement options, instead. She pulls her left arm in toward her body, drawing arthritis into the elbow and hand. Her spine curves and hips pull in, so that her feet shuffle as she walks. An elderly form begins to emerge, but then the dancer takes a breath and stands up tall. "In this way, I found the woman I wanted to work with. Later in the program, I'll introduce her to you."

After three modern dances set to abstract music, the lights come up on an old woman carrying a colander of string beans to the front of the stage. She stops and smiles when she sees the audience, warm and welcoming. "Howdy," she says. "I'm Addie. Who are you all?" For the next few minutes, Addie Gray tells stories. She talks about having been visited by an eager girl from up north carrying a clipboard, and how the girl eventually put the clipboard away and then she began

to learn about life in the mountains. She sings a verse of a song from a prayer meetin' and shows how she moved a mop like a snake to scare the church kids who were cleaning out the collapsed barn. Then she tells a story about her neighbor, who had a close call in a coal mine, but keeps going back in because he doesn't have a choice. She thanks the audience for coming, invites them back anytime, and shuffles to the back of the stage, turning to wave and smile brightly before she exits.

(This is a description of my honors thesis in dance, Wesleyan University, 1984. Using performance as a means of relaying a message about social justice was a new approach for me. Years later I met a fellow alumnus who remembered that performance in detail and the way it brought to life for him a narrative he had not considered. I then began to understand the power of art to effect social change.)

CHAPTER 5: FROM SPECTATOR TO ALLY TO INTIMATE

As a society, we pay a price for our silence. Unchallenged personal, cultural, and institutional racism results in the loss of human potential, lowered productivity, and a rising tide of fear and violence in our society. Individually, racism stifles our own growth and development. It clouds our vision and distorts our perceptions. It alienates us not only from others but also from ourselves and our own experience.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”*

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more he sees the potential that is within him.

Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

In this chapter I explore cross-cultural relationships. I begin with a series of impressions gained from moments of contact I have had with ALANA people, then I move on to a discussion of interracial friendship. From there I explore in detail my two most intimate, most enduring, interracial relationships: first with Jerone, who came into my life through the Fresh Air program, and finally, with my daughter Molly. The chapter concludes with a series of lessons learned about the formation of relationships across difference.

Contact

In the regional high school I attended in Winnetka, there were perhaps 100 African American students among a population of almost 4,000 students. The African American students mostly sat together in the cafeteria, and I didn't know any of them until the girl whose locker was next to mine for four years, Sharon, developed a friendship with an African American girl named Marcie. They were always together and I enjoyed my contact with them. For various reasons the two of them were disenfranchised in our school – Sharon was overweight and in a lower academic track, Marcie was African American, had a lot of acne and was also in the lower track. They had what seemed to me to be a very authentic and reliable friendship. It later occurred to me that they might have been a couple. This stood in contrast to the comings and goings of the very popular cheerleader whose locker abutted mine on the other side. I couldn't keep track of her boyfriends and girl friends whose alliances kept shifting.

In our junior year, a girl I had grown up with but didn't know well began dating an African American boy. They were as public about it as all of the other kids showing off their relationships, and there was a lot of talk about it. I wondered how she could have met him and gotten to know him so well; I had never had any interaction at all with an African American boy at our school. Soon afterward the girl went off to boarding school, while her stepsister, who was also in our grade, stayed home. My conclusion was that Winnetka wasn't ready for interracial dating.

Also during my junior year, a Chinese girl joined my advisory group of about twenty students. Our all-girl advisory was in its third year together. I was drawn to our new classmate, but she spoke no English initially. I felt shy and had never been among non-English speakers, and I didn't know how to cross the language divide. I have often thought of that girl and the challenges she faced, joining our community mid-year, when our student culture had long been formed and wasn't designed for inclusion. I wish I had found a way to get to know her.

On two occasions in my young adulthood, I found myself unexpectedly in African American neighborhoods. One summer evening in my junior year of college, after driving alone to Manhattan to watch a dance performance at Lincoln Center, I looked at my map and decided that the fastest way back to Connecticut was to drive straight up the center of Manhattan. Never mind my ignorance about the pace of local traffic versus highway traffic; I didn't imagine where this route would take me. And so I found myself driving through Harlem, late on a Saturday night. At first I was surprised, then scared, then fascinated. Mine was the only European American face for miles, and I got some quizzical looks, but soon noticed that they weren't hostile.

Here, in full swing, was a society that I knew nothing about. People filled the sidewalks and stairways. No one was moving quickly; there was no rush, no discernible destination. People were socializing. My only point of reference was a street fair or a crowd at a parade, but in this case, the crowd *was* the parade. It was the Harlem equivalent of the Italian practice of *faciendo passeggiata*, to make a

pass down the street at dusk, so everyone can see each other and reweave the fabric of the community after a day's events. My quick picture of Harlem through my windshield left me with a proscenium view, not a detailed one. I was reminded of descriptions of the Harlem Renaissance, but this was a different era. In the few minutes I spent in Harlem that night, I learned just enough to know how little I knew.

An experience both similar and starkly different occurred in Portland, Oregon on a mild afternoon a few years later. I had never been there before, and I was taking a city bus to a meeting held at someone's house. I misunderstood my directions and got off at the wrong stop, suitcase in hand. I found myself in a well-kept, suburban neighborhood. Few people were around, and as I walked a few blocks hoping to find a leisurely pedestrian to ask directions of, I realized that every person I saw was African American. The residents were driving or moving from car to house, and a few children were riding bikes. Mostly the streets and yards were empty. I approached a woman and asked for directions. She looked quizzical and pointed to the bus stop I needed. As I stood there, I marveled that I was in a kind of place I hadn't known existed – an African American suburb.

Not long ago I had the opportunity to observe a friend's experience encountering a new neighborhood. When I traveled to visit her family in Maryland, I was startled to uncover a strain of racism in my friend that I had previously been unaware of. She speaks four languages fluently: English, Hebrew, Spanish and French, and she picks up others quickly as she travels. Of

all my friends, this is the one who travels most widely and comfortably, and she is warm and welcoming at every turn. Or so I thought. It surprised and confused me, then, when I was visiting her new home and she described her neighborhood. She expressed discomfort with the Latina/o neighborhood that began a few blocks away, citing gang activity and vandalism. When we went for a walk, we passed a yard sale in the driveway of a Spanish-speaking family. I asked if she would speak to them in Spanish, and her expression was sour – she had no intention of interacting with them. I was shocked by this, in part because I had previously felt my friend was so cosmopolitan, and also because these people were her neighbors, living a few blocks away in houses that looked like hers, leading a similar lifestyle. There was nothing threatening about them or anyone in the environment, as far as I could see. But I didn't challenge my friend on her opinions, beyond some pointed questions. As I thought about it further, I realized that her travels had mostly been in Europe, Israel and North America and in middle and owning class settings. She happily spoke her Spanish in Spain, not in the Americas. Her travels had not decentered her experience, as mine had.

The three stories above reinforce for me the potential power of travel as education. Often when I listen to my very intelligent and kind mother expound her ultra-conservative viewpoints, I wonder how we ended up with such different political and social understandings. We grew up in the same community and attended the same high school. We share many habits, inclinations and personality traits. But at a certain fork in the road, she prioritizes individual liberty, and I

choose the common good. Why? We have each pondered this question. My conclusion is that our different travel experiences, and the kinds of contact we have each experienced with “otherness” as a result, have landed us in different places. My mother’s travels have been more recreational in nature (involving resorts, cruises and national parks), and mine have often been educational (involving planned disequilibrium so that I could grow in new directions). When she became a parent, my mother made a commitment not to pass on the underlying, unspecified fear that had been with her since childhood. She consequently encouraged us to follow our inclinations to explore the world. I am grateful to her for her vision and trust in our abilities and judgments. My story surely has been shaped by her commitment to my growth and health, even as my travels have sometimes led me away from her foundational values.

Professor

I have some assumptions about African Americans who are working in higher education, particularly in predominantly European American institutions. I assume that these scholars are courageous, diplomatic, intelligent and patient. I assume that they encounter and field ignorance on a daily basis (not only about their area of academic expertise, as all teachers do, but also about racial and cultural issues), and that people make frequent reference, at least in their minds, to their professor’s presumed race. I also assume that African Americans in higher education need to be emotionally and/or spiritually mature in order to navigate the

grinding ignorance of students and faculty with whom they work. The film *Shattering the Silences*, which details the intense challenges facing ALANA professors, verifies these assumptions.¹

Dr. Sherwood Smith, a colleague of mine at UVM, told a story in class about a time when he was standing outside a hotel and someone asked him to park their car. Dr. Smith was attending a conference at the hotel at the time. One of the students in his class asked, “How do you know that happened because you’re Black?” In the spirit of education, and because he was teaching the course on multiculturalism, my colleague was expected patiently to explain his rationale to his student (and he did). But what must he do with his frustration at having to explain this kind of thing over and over? I would get angry and frustrated and just want to retreat into a cohort that understands without explanation. When I heard about this critical incident in my colleague’s classroom, I sent him a condolence message. I wondered how he could teach this subject and these people year after year. I worried about his morale, and his health. How can he, does he, get a break? When I asked him, he said that his job as an African American professor teaching topics related to multiculturalism in a predominantly European American institution involve real highs as he witnesses breakthroughs in people’s thinking, and deep lows as he repeatedly confronts the same types of resistance to his reality and to learning about forms of privilege and power. I admire his dignity and skill in riding those waves.

Friends

Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendships, edited by Emily Bernard,² gives me hope for the bigger picture of eradicating racism, but I feel lonely in reading it. I have a few friends of other racial identifications who are close enough that I hug them when I see them, but we don't go to each other's homes, invite each other to our families' weddings and bar mitzvahs, or ask each other for significant favors.

If I were asked to write a chapter about my experiences of interracial friendship, I would have to write about why I don't have any close friends of different racial identifications. What are my reasons? Right now, the fact that I live in Vermont, the second most racially monocultural state in the U.S., is one reason. And I have spent virtually all of my life in similar environments, from my hometown, to various rural towns in New Hampshire, to Vermont. I did live for a year in Medford, Massachusetts and another year in Seattle, and I attended Wesleyan University, which, though it is an expensive private school, is known for its unusual diversity for schools in that category. Still, even when I lived in those places, my friendship pool didn't get much more diverse racially, or in other ways either. Why? It wasn't and isn't for lack of desire for an honest connection with people from various backgrounds and experiences. I'm drawn to the breadth of human experience. I'm a trained mediator, in part because I enjoy hearing diverse perspectives and discerning common ground and areas of true disagreement, then helping people sort out a mutually agreeable resolution to

sticky issues. I enjoy that grappling, but when I come face to face with someone whom I perceive or imagine comes from a significantly different place than I do and my role is not already defined (e.g., as a teacher or student in a class), I feel self-conscious and worried that I will blunder into offending the person, or I focus so strongly on what I imagine to be our differences that I can't find an essentially human starting point for an interaction.

I am reminded of a wonderful short story by Carson McCullers that I used to teach in my upper-level ESL courses called "A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud,"³ in which a down-and-out man, searching for decades for a woman who left him, concludes that he wasn't ready to love a woman. First, he needed to learn how to love a tree, a rock, a cloud, and then he could take on the complexity of loving a woman. Loving someone from a different racial or class background, particularly, is complicated and delicate for me because it requires pulling back the veil of ignorance and prejudice that I see through. I feel sure that that veil is obvious and visible to these people, so I am ashamed from the start, and that's not an easy beginning to a relationship. Like the man in McCullers' story who practices his loving on trees and clouds, I have some things to work out in order to become more consistently comfortable and confident in forming relationships across differences of race and class. My natural introversion adds to the challenge.

I do have a point of reference for sustained cultural and religious bridge-building with my peers. Beginning in college, most of my closest relationships were with Jewish people. My two closest women friends began my initiation into

secular Jewish culture; my college boyfriend added religious education and practice. Thus by my junior year, I found myself singing Hebrew prayers at Shabbat services on Friday evenings, then teaching Sunday school at the Congregational church two days later. The cognitive dissonance grew, and Judaism ultimately won out. When the Congregational minister urged me to consider the ministry, I responded that I wasn't Christian (by that time I wasn't teaching Sunday school anymore). Ultimately I married a Jewish man and we maintain a secular Jewish household. How did I develop such a comfort level across religious difference? It happened one nigan⁴ and one latke at a time. I was actively invited in by a number of people, not because they were recruiting converts but simply as a natural expression of their culture of extroversion. Though individual Jews might be reserved (and I fell in love with two of them), Jewish environments tend to be rich with lively dialogue and inquiry. I felt warmed and welcomed from the beginning.

As a European American woman from a wealthy background, I don't expect to be warmly welcomed across racial or class lines. Bernard's book at once encourages me and provides some cautionary tales. Most of the essays in the book by ALANA people begin with a caveat that though they are writing about true friendships with specific European Americans, they have good reasons to distrust most European Americans, and the writers detail some of those reasons. Many also describe the painful tensions and attentions of liberal, well-meaning but awkward and ashamed European Americans who say or do a lot of ignorant

things along the way. In some cases, friendships deepen and prevail. Some necessary ingredients of the friendships described in the book seem to be 1) honesty and forthrightness about racial issues, 2) respectful humility, on the part of the European American friend, to listen carefully and to become an authentic ally on racial issues, and 3) a willingness to leave race aside and enjoy relating on many other levels.

Jerone⁵

Nine years ago, my husband Michael and I enrolled in a program linking New York City kids with suburban and rural families for cross-cultural sharing designed to give low-income kids vacations outside the city. When the two women arrived from the Fresh Air Fund to interview us and look at our home, they informed us that our Fresh Air child was most likely to be African American, and that there were certain things we should know. For instance, they explained that African Americans need to wear sun block, and that if we have a girl with braids and a braid falls off, we shouldn't throw it out – it is a hair extension, not her own hair, and is expensive to replace. We were also told that city kids are often afraid of our dark rural nights, woods and insects, and that they might say they can swim when they really can't. Our Fresh Air child was an eight-year-old African American boy named Jerone, and except for the hair extensions, everything else we were briefed about proved true. When Jerone's mother called

prior to his arrival, she told me that he might break his glasses, which also came to pass.

Jerone arrived on a bus with the other Fresh Air kids on a rainy afternoon. He looked forlorn standing straight and still by the registration desk, identification tag around his neck. We introduced ourselves and got in the car. Jerone looked around at the drizzling countryside and began to ask questions: “You have Nintendo? You have T. V.? You have sons?” With each successive “No,” I watched Jerone in the rearview mirror, sinking lower into the back seat. The sound of his voice was unfamiliar to my husband Michael and me, and we were all having difficulty understanding each other. When he asked about sons, I responded, “It doesn’t rain very much here. I’m sure the sun will be out tomorrow.” Michael shook his head. “He’s asking if we have sons,” he said quietly. “Oh no, we don’t have any kids. We have a cat, though.” Jerone perked up. “You have a dog?” “No, but we have lots of neighbors with dogs and kids, and you can play with all of them. They’re all excited to meet you.” Finally Jerone asked, “You’ll teach me to swim?” I assured him that we would, and the conversation picked up a little. When we got home (having stopped to look at the buffalo on our neighbors’ farm), our cat scattered and Jerone quickly ascertained that we didn’t have a toy in the house. Michael and I realized in the same flash that our adult home must look painfully sterile to an eight-year-old.

Fortunately, we live in an intentional community of seventeen families. Our homes are clustered together on about six acres of land, and within our

community live 16 children, five dogs, three playgrounds and hundreds, if not thousands, of toys. Michael and Jerone put on raincoats, took out the garden cart, and went door-to-door, meeting neighbors and borrowing toys. They came back with a mountain of games, puzzles, action figures, Legos, books and sports equipment, and play dates with our neighbors' kids had been scheduled for the coming days. By the next day, we had found Jerone a bike and a helmet, and we were on our way. Like one of those wafer-like sponges that expands to its normal size when wet, Jerone transformed from a soft-spoken, watchful boy to a lively, friendly, jovial kid in a matter of hours.

Three days into his two-week visit, Jerone and I found ourselves grooming one of the neighborhood dogs together. As we combed and patted Popo, Jerone looked up at me and quietly said, "I want to ask you something, but I'm afraid you'll say no." I said that I might, but I thought he should ask and find out. With a little blush he said, "Can I call you 'Mommy'?" It wasn't the first time in the three days that I had blinked away tears. Without children of my own, I had found the sudden responsibility and companionship of this surrogate parenthood very moving. I wasn't sure how to respond to Jerone's question. One of our neighbors also had a Fresh Air child visiting, and unbeknownst to me, the same question was being asked at their house (and I now know it's a common question among Fresh Air kids in general). I took a breath and said yes.

When Jerone called home a day later, the first thing he said to his mother was, "I call Edorah 'Mommy' and Michael 'Daddy' now." I cringed. When I

spoke to his mother, Jenieke, I asked if she minded. She laughed. "I don't mind! You are his Mommy right now." On the next call, though, when Jerone handed me the phone, his mother said, less jovially, "I guess he's settling right in there. He just said he wanted to stay there forever." I cringed again. I mumbled something about everyone wishing their vacations would last longer, but I started to worry. Would Jerone's time with us cause him to reflect negatively on his own home and life? Would his mother distrust us and worry that we were trying to win him away from her? What was the long-term impact of the Fresh Air program on the kids? Since I had taken my vacation time to spend all day, every day with Jerone and take him on all kinds of adventures, was I creating for him a utopian image of what life for European American, middle-class kids is like?

Jerone visited us for eight consecutive summers. Our caretaker/child relationship was intimate from the start. Jerone and I often lay together at bedtime reading Calvin and Hobbes books, laughing at the antics of Calvin, who had much the same outlook on life as Jerone. When he got old enough to sit in the front seat, Jerone learned to change gears with the gearshift at exactly the right moment when I pushed in the clutch, eventually doing so without prompting, feeling the rhythm of the car and my driving. Each year it took us a day or two to get used to each other's use of language, and we would laugh at how often we had to say, "What?" Over the years we have developed some of the mundane, inside knowledge that only family has of each other. When my husband and I told

Jerone that we were going to adopt a little girl, he told everyone, “I’m going to have a sister!” and sure enough, as soon as she arrived, the sibling rivalry began.

I could write a small book about everything Jerone and I have experienced and learned together. Most of its chapters and anecdotes would be told without reference to race, because our story has far more to do with an adult and child loving each other than of racial difference. Over all these years, Jerone has never initiated a conversation about race, and at first he expressed discomfort when the topic came up. On his first visit, I asked about the racial composition of his neighborhood and school. Jerone answered “Black” with closure in his voice. When I insisted that Jerone wear sunscreen and slathered it on him, we talked about our skin. I complemented him on the rich brown color of his skin, and he looked a little surprised, but not displeased. He asked whether he could get sunburned and I said yes, though probably not as readily as I might. After that he proudly resisted sunscreen saying he didn’t need it, while I insisted he did. He enjoyed this disagreement, but later, he grumbled that he had become darker in the sun. I protested, but he reiterated that he preferred to be lighter.

At the end of his second visit, Jerone and I experienced a flagrantly racist incident. Jerone, as usual, had instantly made friends at the beach and was swimming with a heavy child wearing shorts and a t-shirt. After playing together for almost an hour, Jerone revealed through his use of pronouns that he thought his companion was a girl. The boy exploded in anger. I tried to explain that Jerone had just made a mistake, but he yelled, “I’m not going to play with a Black kid

anyway!” As soon as he said it, we all looked at one another, stunned. Jerone looked surprised but not angry. I told the boy he couldn’t play with Jerone if he was going to treat him so badly. I looked desperately around for the child’s parent, but only saw a teenaged caregiver sunning on the beach. Jerone then moved back to the boy to play with him again, and they resumed their play for a few minutes. I was trying to come up with an appropriate response to the incident (the Fresh Air program hadn’t prepared us for this), but I was paralyzed by the weirdness of the layers of gender and racial oppression joined with the boys’ inclination to continue playing. When Jerone and I prepared to go a few minutes later, the boy ran out of the water, got on his bike, and rode it straight into the lake until only his head and shoulders could be seen. He was clearly disturbed, but before and even after the incident, the boys got along. It was as though they both wanted to return the situation to some kind of normalcy before they parted ways.

I was torn up by the event and felt that I had failed Jerone. It was our last day together, and I feared that Jerone would be left with an impression of Vermont as a racist environment and his Vermont Mommy as someone who wouldn’t protect him or at least advocate fiercely on his behalf. After a gut-wrenching night of doubt, I finally raised the topic again in the car on the way to Jerone’s bus home. “You know that boy you were playing with at the beach yesterday?” I said. I had prepared a short morality speech about how Jerone never deserved to be treated like that, and how kids who hurt others have been hurt in the past themselves, etc. But I never got that far. “That kid’s a girl!!” Jerone

stormed. We were both on the verge of tears because we were going to the bus anyway, and I knew we couldn't recover the conversation, so that was the end of it.

I have since learned more about the boy at the beach. He is a student with special needs, and his parents are quite wealthy. He often plays alone. I thought about trying to work with him somehow, perhaps offering to do some kind of prejudice reduction work with his class. Ultimately, I didn't do anything more about the events at the beach, except to think about what I would do if something similar happens in the future, though even that's inconclusive. I thought I should relay the incident to Jerone's mother, but I never did so, afraid that she wouldn't let him return. I now wish I had been more honest with her and that I had been bolder and elicited more of a discussion between the boys. Someday I'll ask Jerone what he remembers about that incident and what he wishes I had done differently, if anything.

In preparation for his third visit to Vermont, I had a conversation with Jerone's mother that exposed a whole array of my assumptions about race, class, urban-dwellers and single-parent families. Two summers prior, when Jerone asked if he could spend the whole summer with us, it occurred to me to see if I could extend his visit in Vermont by helping him get a scholarship to attend a Vermont summer camp. He and his mom liked the idea, so I hunted around for opportunities. By the time I found a camp that I thought he would enjoy (having viewed a promotional video from another camp that looked like a white

supremacy camp as I tried to watch it through Jerone's mother's eyes), the deadline for scholarship applications had passed and we needed to turn the paperwork around within twenty-four hours. That meant that I needed to call Jerone's mom and ask her if she would mind answering a list of personal financial questions over the phone. The alternative would have been for her to receive a fax, fill out the forms, and return the fax within the same period. I assumed that she did not have easy access to a fax machine, that she would not have time to accomplish this given her work schedule, and that the forms might be difficult for her to fill out due to literacy issues.

Jerone's mom and I had spoken many times over the phone during the three years that Jerone had been visiting us, and we had shared stories and decisions about him. I thought I had a pretty clear picture of Jerone's life, even though it's hard to get much detail out of a ten-year-old boy. From Jerone's mother I discovered that what I thought I knew about Jerone's life was largely false, partly due to his incomplete or confusing explanations, but mostly due to my own assumptions based in racism, classism, and whatever -ism it is that generates stereotypes about people who live in urban areas. For instance, when Jerone told me that he lived in an apartment and that he was the only male who lived in his apartment building, I imagined "projects" in which all of the men had been imprisoned, killed, etc. Now I know that Jerone lives with his sisters and mother in the downstairs apartment of his grandmother's house. It's true he's the

only male, but there are only five women in the building, and they're all members of his family.

I had also wondered about Jerone's mother's literacy. Jerone's aunt had filled out his health form for the Fresh Air program, and I knew his mother worked in food services in a nursing home. Jerone had told me that he didn't have any books at home and that no one read to him, so I thought perhaps his mom couldn't read. Now she told me that she had lost her job in the computer field when she got measles and went blind in one eye, resulting in a massive pay cut. She has to work twice as many hours to provide for her family, resulting in less time spent with Jerone. His older sisters are in college, and Jerone's mother told me that she was able to spend much more time with them as they grew up, given her stronger economic position. Then she told me that she had enrolled Jerone in the Fresh Air program in hopes that he would gain a relationship that would help him if anything were to happen to her. I told her she had succeeded in doing that, and thanked her again for sharing her beloved son with us.

I was humbled and grateful for this opportunity to expose and correct my ignorance, but this conversation reminded me again of how much it takes for European Americans to root out racism within ourselves. Most European Americans never have the kind of conversation with an African American that I had with Jerone's mother. I could have taken ten courses in sociology, enrolled in ten anti-racism trainings, and attended ten civil rights rallies and never addressed the place within myself in which those assumptions rested.

In the name of loving Jerone, I knocked on his mother's door, and she opened it wide. Both actions were required for us to reach an understanding. How can we European Americans engender enough humility, curiosity and courage within ourselves to reach out? And how can ALANA people engender enough forgiveness and patience within themselves to open the door? These are painful questions, and we must keep asking them and generating answers. In my case, a wonderful child facilitated this process; I am very fortunate to know him.

Months later, when Jerone was once again at our house, Jenieke asked me to call her Joan, because that's what her friends call her. A few nights later, I was ironing camp labels on Jerone's clothes, and he was on the phone with his mother, relaying a conversation between the two of us. He was calling both of us "Mommy" and the conversation became garbled. I picked up the phone and declared, "There are a lot of Mommies here. I'm getting confused!" We all laughed until both Mommies cried.

One day when Jerone was 15, he and I were talking about geography. He mentioned that at one point, Africans had built a bridge to America. I casually responded that that was impossible because the Atlantic Ocean was too vast. Jerone was offended and dug in, repeating his assertion in increasingly adamant tones, finishing by saying, "I'm talking about Black people and you don't know anything about it!" OK. There were obviously many layers of communication (and miscommunication) at play here. In retrospect, I wish I had turned the conversation toward many of the outstanding accomplishments of Black people

throughout history. That was, of course, the larger point. At the time, though, I dug in too, choosing instead to try to straighten out Jerone's misunderstanding of geography. Instead, I only succeeded in reinforcing his notion that I didn't know anything about Black people. After Jerone returned home that year, I sent him a book about African American inventors.

When Jerone started junior high school, his mother told me that Jerone had been referred for a special education evaluation and that she was trying to decide whether or not to agree to the evaluation. She asked my advice. We were both stumped. On the one hand, Jerone's literacy skills were weak, and if he qualified for services, the extra help might accelerate his progress. Alternatively, he could be labeled and pulled out of the regular education classroom for remediation, or shuffled into a low academic track where he could lose the fragile motivation he had. We didn't talk about the sociopolitical factors that could be at play in the referral, or the larger consequences.

In the end, Joan decided not to have Jerone evaluated, but she required that he attend summer school every summer throughout his school years. This strategy paid off. Jerone's skills steadily improved, and his motivation for learning and graduating increased significantly after he entered a vocational high school and chose carpentry as his concentration. He will graduate in June and has already won one of the coveted places in the carpentry union's next apprenticeship class following high school.

On his deathbed, Jerone's grandfather had implored Jerone's mother to ensure that Jerone learned a trade. Jerone had shown no interest in following his sisters to college, and his childhood dreams of becoming an athlete didn't align with his natural talents. Nor did his evolving interests in becoming a firefighter, a policeman, and a soldier match his gentle nature. But as soon as he started on-the-job training, drawing a paycheck and working alongside men, his voice noticeably changed on the phone. All that had been vague in his speech and affect before, now grew clearer. Recently Jerone called me with excitement in his voice to tell me that he passed his final Regent's exams and only needs to complete one more course to graduate. He is on his way.

Molly

Thirty years ago I decided that, for environmental reasons, I would not give birth to children. Some environmental scientists were already arguing at that time that the planet was overpopulated and the situation was quickly getting worse. After college I learned that the one child policy in China was leading to the abandonment of thousands of baby girls, and that these girls were beginning to be adopted internationally. I knew immediately that I would someday adopt a little girl from China. On our first date, my husband and I talked about adoption. He was quite open to the idea.

Now we are the parents of a five-year-old girl, born of Chinese parents, and I sit at my computer and gaze at her picture, my screensaver, as I write on a

page collapsed to the bottom of my screen. I love my daughter fiercely. When I look at her, my heart swells and my eyes sometimes tear. Sometimes I look at her Asian features; sometimes I look at her mood; sometimes I look at her movements; sometimes I look at her thoughts; sometimes I look at her size, her skin, the whiteness of her teeth. Sometimes I look at her bruises and scratches; sometimes I look at the cat scratch scar across her nose and wonder if it is permanent. Sometimes I look at her haircut, or whether her nails need to be trimmed. Sometimes I look at the way she moves her hands. As I look at her, sometimes I think about her birthparents and wonder to what extent I am looking at them.

European American babies don't interest me much, unless there's something unusual about them. They often look too big to me, too pale, too still and boring. Molly is brownish, bubbly, tiny and well coordinated, always moving and creating sound – narrating, inquiring, singing. I'm exhausted much of the time, but as soon as she's gone, I'm bored.

My daughter sometimes looks at pictures of other Chinese children and asks if they are she. Sometimes the children are boys, or older than she is. It makes me wonder if she is already generalizing her appearance as virtually the only Asian face in her living environment. We have many images of Asian children and adults in photos on our refrigerator, in books in her book collection, and in artwork. Still, the humans she interacts with throughout every day are almost without exception European American. I know this isn't good for her. I

have made some attempts to spend time with Chinese people. We have had play dates with other girls adopted from China, and we have attended Chinese New Year's celebrations in which Chinese children and adults were in the majority. When I asked Hal Colston, whose story about his sons' racial profiling I told earlier, for his advice about raising a child of color in Vermont he said, "Go up to Chinatown in Montreal twice a month." For Molly's sake, we should be prepared to move to a more diverse environment, perhaps. On the other hand, in our intentional community of 17 closely connected households, Molly knows many adults in the community as friends and caregivers and many neighborhood children as surrogate siblings. As I take stock of the support and nurturance in her life, I find real abundance within our home and literally just outside its doors.

One summer day when Molly was two, she and I were watching a neighbor play in a little league game, and a little blonde girl started to play with us. "Why is she brown and you're white?" she said. There was nothing accusatory in her tone; it was an innocent question. "Well, I'm not white, really, I'm kind of beige," I answered. "She was born in China and we adopted her there, if that's what you're talking about." "Oh, we're going to adopt two girls from there," she said. Two girls? This sounded a bit unlikely, at least as a plan already forged and disclosed to this 4- or 5-year-old child. Still, she was making a positive connection with us. We liked each other.

This was the first time someone had explicitly commented on the difference in race between my daughter and me, or at least the first time it had

come up with a stranger, out of context. Between the moment that she posed the question and my realization that she was a small child and that her tone was innocent, a quick tide of defensiveness, protection and irritation had risen in my chest. Why? It is a fact that my daughter and I look different and that most people wouldn't immediately identify us as related.

At one of the Chinese New Year parties we attended, a Chinese woman sitting near me shared my gaze at the antics of my daughter as she spun around at the foot of the stage. The woman asked me, through simple English and gesture, whether I had given birth to Molly. "No, I adopted her in China," I said. She drew a circle around her face. "You look the same," she said. "Sometimes children start to look like people they're with all of the time." I felt very touched by this, that a stranger, especially a Chinese woman, would see me in my daughter. I thought it was generous of her, and kind. But more, I felt a deep pride in my daughter, and a longing to be connected with her in every way possible.

When I taught ESL in Cambridge to people from more than 40 different countries, I was especially drawn to my Chinese students, and I told my roommates that I thought I might marry a Chinese man (though I didn't have one in mind). Ultimately I married a Jewish American man, whom I admired for his quiet honesty, his humor and pragmatism, and his somewhat brooding good looks. But my affinity for China, its history, culture and people remained in my consciousness, and I nurtured that affinity by reading about China and aspiring to travel there.

I didn't make it there until we went to adopt our daughter. Our trip was an intensely emotional one. Beginning with our final childless Valentine's Day in Hong Kong, we traveled inland to meet our daughter. We traveled with 11 other families, all setting out to adopt 13-month-old girls from the same orphanage. Though we were all European Americans with enough means to adopt internationally, we were diverse in many ways. Unlikely to have become friends even had we lived in the same town, we were now cast together for one of the biggest events in our lives. Coming from 10 states and various religions, professions, socio-economic environments and child-rearing philosophies, we became by circumstance intimate companions.

Our guide told us it was her job to help us fall in love with China. For us, she didn't have to work hard for her goal to be realized, though she did work extremely hard in general. Michael and I cried daily in China. I can't speak for Michael, but my tears were often about my grief in taking Molly from her native country – her people, language, smells, culture and potential. China is a land of numerous and sometimes painful paradoxes, a description I would also apply to the United States. There the similarities end. I knew that while we would try hard to instill the best of American values in our daughter, she would necessarily miss out on some of the virtues of the Chinese.

On our return trip from China, I was looking forward to seeing how my place in the world would shift with my new status as a mother. The very first thing that became apparent when we got off the plane in Newark was that a door

had appeared in my relationships with African Americans. Repeatedly throughout the airport, African American men and women interacted affectionately with my child. My daughter was very social and loved the attention. Some European Americans also engaged my daughter, but there was a clear difference in the number and warmth of the interactions. I was discovering something about the value of children to African Americans. I realize that this is too large a statement, encompassing too many people, but there was something qualitatively different in those interactions, and in the ensuing years I have seen it repeated in other contexts. I don't know whether it makes a difference that my daughter is of Chinese origin. Would the same hold true if I had a European American child? An African American one?

I get some strange looks when I tell people that my daughter's name is Molly. Sometimes I imagine that they're disturbed that I gave my Chinese daughter an Anglo name. Do they want to hear a Chinese name? Do they feel that I have robbed her of an important tie to her heritage? I wonder about that myself, though it is now the most common practice for families adopting from China to retain their daughter's Chinese name as her middle name and give her a European American first name. Or are they uncomfortable sharing an Anglo name with an Asian face? Before we were matched to our daughter, I imagined that if she had a Chinese name that was pleasing to the American ear, we would keep it. I imagined the name Ming or Mei or Ying. Our daughter's name turned out to be Feng (pronounced, approximately, "Fung" with a nasal sound in the vowel), a

name given her by orphanage officials in the absence of knowledge of her birth name. Feng is a beautiful name in China meaning phoenix, the symbol of feminine power (yin). A famous empress in China had this name and decorated her whole palace with phoenixes. Often the dragon (the masculine power symbol of yang) is depicted with the phoenix in Chinese art. I love all of these things about my daughter's name, and I frequently call her Molly Feng, but I worried that Feng in itself would lend itself to disrespect in American mouths. Perhaps we have done her a disservice. I considered translating her name and calling her "Phoenix," but my husband thought this would draw even more attention to her differences as an Asian child in a predominantly European American region. As a five-year-old, Molly is someone who enjoys as much attention as she can gather. It wouldn't surprise me if she chose, as she gets older, to call herself Phoenix or something even more unique. Molly is named after her great grandmother, following the Jewish tradition of using the first initial of a beloved deceased relative. Molly's great grandmother was named Mary, possibly by authorities at Ellis Island. As a teenager, she fled pogroms in Russia with a bullet in her leg. Like Molly, she was a survivor of a rough start in life, and she went on to live a long and happy life. All of her children became committed educators, the profession I have also chosen for myself.

Another aspect of this naming ritual that further complicates matters is that the Chinese themselves give themselves English names when they are in an English-speaking environment. All of our guides in China introduced themselves

with English names: Daphne, Ellen, Joanne, Raymond, etc. And many American-born Chinese Americans were given English names at birth. There's no right answer to any of this. Molly will eventually tell me herself whether she feels respected by our choices, and she will have the power to change them if she wishes to do so.

At 27, I changed my own first name. I had been named Eddie Jane Frazer at birth – a concession, I'm told, to my brother, who had wished in vain for a brother six times when I was born, and so was allowed to name me himself. I was named after my uncle, a brilliant but multiply addicted, eccentric (and/or mentally ill) man whose life generated many interesting stories within our family. As a result, I was constantly called upon to explain my name, repeating again and again the story: that I was a mistake, both in conception and in gender, and that my name was created as a consolation. One morning as I snowshoed up Wolf Jaw Mountain in the Adirondacks in the pale lavender snow of pre-dawn, I realized that this was not a life-affirming story and that I could actually end the telling of it by changing my name.

In adopting Molly and bringing her here from China, we have not only asked, but forced her to move across cultures. We should be prepared to do the same, so that together we constitute a truly multicultural family, not a European American one with a Chinese child in its midst.

The Way Forward

Reprogramming

Gladwell wrote extensively about first impressions and the hazards of acting upon them. Following his discussion of the IAT experiments at Harvard revealing participants' deep-seated, positive and negative associations with different racial groups, Gladwell describes how researcher Benaji discovered a kind of antiserum to the phenomenon of stereotyping. "I had a student who used to take the IAT every day. It was the first thing he did, and his idea was just to let the data gather as he went. Then this one day, he got a positive association with blacks. And he said, 'That's odd. I've never gotten that before,' because we've all tried to change our IAT score and we couldn't. But he's a track-and-field guy, and what he realized is that he'd spent the morning watching the Olympics." Gladwell concludes that:

If something is happening outside of awareness, how on earth do you fix it? The answer is that we are not helpless in the face of our first impressions. They may bubble up from the unconscious – from behind a locked door inside of our brain – but just because something is outside of awareness doesn't mean it's outside of control. If you are a white person who would like to treat black people as equals in every way – who would like to have a set of associations with blacks that are as positive as those that you have with whites – it requires more than a simple commitment to equality. It requires that you change your life so that you are exposed to minorities on a regular basis and become comfortable with them and familiar with the best of their culture, so that when you want to meet, hire, date, or talk with a member of a minority, you aren't betrayed by your hesitation and discomfort.⁶

Reprogramming our stereotypes requires the conscious development of positive associations to replace the negative images in one's mind. Until I traveled

to Appalachia and stayed in the homes of some of the poorest people in the country, my stereotypes ranged from “Beverly Hillbillies” images to associations of poverty with lazy people living on the dole. In the course of a week, I encountered authentic generosity and personal sacrifice to make me feel welcomed and comfortable. I met illiterate people who were also more politically astute than many of the people in my affluent hometown. And I saw first-hand the effects of the coal mining industry on people’s health, safety, morale and natural environment. I witnessed the blatant exploitation of human beings by industry, and developed my own critique of capitalism as a result. While I could have read about these things in books, I don’t think I would have understood if I hadn’t sat at the table, looked down the mine shafts, and prayed on my knees with my hosts. In doing so, my own life and worldview were decentered, and I gained a crucial perspective on the social and cultural vantage point I had inhabited up until that time. In the process, I laughed, ate, sang, prayed and told stories with people who didn’t “look like me” but who were, in fundamentally human ways, recognizable and familiar in the end.

Mentors and Prophets

My travels to Appalachia were initially facilitated by my mentor Rita, and later I returned to the region alone and with a series of friends who learned their own lessons from the experience. I wanted to share my profound learning, as well as the love and warmth that I had experienced in eastern Kentucky. This is how

mentoring works, and as I get older, I am more often in the role of mentor than of apprentice. But I will always look ahead on the path to see who's there, and what I can learn from them. While I would welcome the appearance of new mentors in my life, I am more aware now of the prophets – those figures, well-known or little-known, who possess an expansive view or a penetrating gaze that calls me to enter into a broader realm of consciousness.

Many of the prophets on my journey have been African American women. From the political courage and vision of Sojourner Truth and Rosa Parks, to the artistic works of Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Leontyne Price and Sweet Honey in the Rock, to the terrible risks and visionary sacrifices of Harriet Tubman, to name a few, these African American women represent to me outstanding examples of wisdom, resiliency, beauty, creativity and resourcefulness.

Doors

Jenieke and Jerone Macy, Augusta Sumrall, Rita Wonders-Rhoades and my friends in Appalachia have all offered me doors into their lives in a loving and educative way. I needed to be open and curious to engage in learning from them; they were willing, generous and trusting enough to invite me in to various degrees. Though European Americans can't expect ALANA people to lead us out of our ignorance regarding racial issues and our own white identities, we also can't accomplish this growth without some contact and dialogue with ALANA

people. Structured environments (courses, trainings, community dialogues, etc.) can be helpful in providing the ground rules and support for candid conversation. Ultimately, though, to attain the goal of harmony and mutual respect across difference, many different combinations of people will need to open their doors and invite each other in.

Cultural Competence

The concept of cultural competence is useful in that it draws attention to cultural bodies of knowledge that can be learned in order to forge stronger connections across cultures and to avoid inadvertent offenses. When I was told by the Fresh Air Fund that Jerone might be terrified of the darkness outside and that he might say he could swim when he really couldn't, I was learning lessons about Jerone's cultural context that would not only make us more comfortable together but that could also potentially save his life. To me, the summer darkness holds fireflies, meteors and marshmallows. But when I took one of my Nature's Classroom groups on a night hike, an African American boy from New York City glimpsed one of the other European American instructors in the woods and dove into my arms, screaming in terror about the Klan. Learning as much as possible about each other's contexts and remaining curious lays a respectful and promising foundation on which relationships can form.

Self-Reflection

As all of these strategies for learning and relationship-building are pursued, ongoing self-reflection is essential for real growth to occur. Although I have had a variety of relationships and experiences to guide me, I know that I can slip into ignorance and entitlement, with the accompanying stereotyping and racist action, unless I continue to be vigilant about my own patterns of thought and emotion regarding others. As my contact with people of different backgrounds increases, my self-consciousness and awkwardness recede. I welcome this emerging comfort, but my work is not done. My ability to engage in increasingly authentic and intimate relationships with people of other race and class identities depends on my progress in becoming aware, enlivened and appropriately empowered in my own race and class identity. Shame and guilt do not form the basis for healthy relationships, nor do arrogance and entitlement. It takes a spiraling process of contact with others and internal reflection to ground the authentic self that I can then offer to the community.

INTERLUDE: BELLY TO BELLY

I don't want to race with you,
Erase, e-race, chase with you.
I don't want to run or rat-race,
Mind-game, head trip, scream or scam race.

I don't want to elbow you,
anesthetize, hypnotize,
marginalize, finalize,
intimidate, aggravate,
immolate or jeopardize.

I would rather dance with you ~
curling,
whirling,
unfurling, surely

If we dance I might embrace you,
Belly to belly, and face to face.

Edorah Frazer

CHAPTER 6: FROM STANDING BACK TO STEPPING UP

So many, having made their awesome decision for autonomy and independence from tradition, and having taken their firm stand against injustice and hypocrisy, find it hard to convert themselves into affirmative builders of a better society. How many of them will seek their personal fulfillment by making the hard choices, and by undertaking the rigorous preparation that building a better society requires?

Robert Greenleaf, *On Becoming a Servant Leader*

Leadership means taking responsibility for what matters to you.

Victor Carey

This chapter charts the course of my emerging activism as an antiracist. I begin with a story and a question about silence in response to racism, then I describe my first forays into activism, followed by a discussion of how my evolution as an economic activist might be applied to the realm of race. The chapter concludes with a series of strategies for developing antiracist citizenship.

Brother

My brother is a sweet man, 13 years my senior. He is a financial executive, and his politics fall on the far right, in line with my parents'. He is known in our family for his intelligence, having scored high on the IQ tests used to measure us as kids.¹ He still enjoys taking standardized tests, and at age 50 took the GRE for fun the same year I had to take it for graduate school.

A few years ago I had a consulting job that required monthly trips to Cleveland, where my brother lives. Thus began a series of hotel dinners where the two of us sat, alone for the first time as oldest and youngest siblings in a six-child family. My brother engages in “report talk,” a form of communication common to European American men in powerful positions,² so I had a lot of opportunity to look at him and think about him as I listened. He is witty and kind, and he occasionally ferries abused and rescued pets across whole states so that they can reach more loving owners. He espouses Christian values, treats people well at work, and, when he was sent to England to start a new branch for his company, he hired all women (of several colors and nationalities), because they were the most qualified applicants. He got grief for it from the home office, but he stood by his decisions.

One evening at dinner my brother began talking about politics. I don’t recall our initial topic, but I do remember that eventually my brother made a blanket statement about Blacks in the U.S., indicating that they complain about their condition without doing much to improve it. He emphasized that they do have “a culture,” implying a single, unified milieu to which they all belonged. My brother is a big man with a resonant voice. I saw our immaculately dressed African American waiter bristle a few yards away. I can’t remember my response. It was weak and quiet, not even constituting a real objection. I was aware that my brother was paying for our expensive meal, and that the other diners were keeping their voices low. I wanted to holler, get up and storm out, or make an articulate,

well-argued, passionate-in-emotion but dispassionate-in-construction retort, allying myself with the millions of people that my brother had just oppressed. But I didn't. And I have never again referred to that conversation with him, until this moment.

I have spent hours thinking about that incident since it happened. Why did I remain silent? I believe it was a combination of gender, money, family history and lore about the relative intelligence of my brother and me, social mores about making scenes in expensive restaurants, fear about my own inarticulateness and emotionality (gender again), and confusion about my brother's life and attitudes.

While he was in England, my brother met and married a dark-skinned Kenyan woman, about twenty years younger than he, and one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen. She comes from a historically powerful Kenyan family, now in political exile. She has a daughter from a previous marriage, so my brother now has a bi-racial stepdaughter. At the time of our restaurant conversation, my brother was in the middle of a complex, expensive and aggravating process of helping his wife become an American citizen. She would, soon, be African American.

So what could he possibly be doing in this conversation, casting one vast, accusatory cloud over all African Americans? I wondered, as I sat in the silence following his canned, conservative stereotype about lazy Blacks. How can an intelligent person arrive at such a conclusion? Our family's lore about my brother's genius disintegrated in my mind, and before me I saw a much more

complex man, arrogant, lonely, and ignorant in some essential ways. Still a man that I love, though in some ways I don't know him very well. Yet that vein of ignorance he displayed that evening is dangerous. So dangerous, when it's understood as a pillar of racism. Now what? How does one even begin to address this person, and this moment? Which brings us to that other pillar of racism, my silence. How does one begin to address *this* person? How do I empower myself to speak up the next time I encounter such an attitude? How do I practice that passionate-but-dispassionate response? How do I help both of us (and everyone else involved in the conversation – essentially, every African and European American) recover our integrity and humanity?

Yesterday my brother called me for my birthday. I mentioned that I was writing my dissertation, and he inquired about my topic. When I began to explain, he acknowledged how challenging it was. He asked if I had considered interviewing people on the subject, and when I responded that I felt it was unlikely that I'd get straight answers about the kinds of racist messages and images many European Americans harbor, he agreed. In the end, he said, "Well, once you get this down to a sentence or two, I'd be happy to read it." He chuckled, and I wondered if he'd ever ask to read my dissertation. If he does, I'll need to prepare him for this page, somehow. Our relationship will never be the same, but maybe it shouldn't be.

Silence

In the fall of 1981, during my first semester at Wesleyan, I took an African American studies course about the history of slavery and resistance in the U.S.

One October night when I was in the course, I heard some chanting and commotion in the quad outside my dorm. I looked out the window to find men in white sheets with white conical hats. They were moving slowly and ritualistically through the courtyard in our u-shaped dorm complex. My blood ran cold. No one seemed to be reacting with alarm, and someone mentioned a fraternity. When they were gone, I went outside and found racist posters on trees and kiosks. I took one down. The group turned out to be a fraternity on campus, ostensibly engaged in a harmless pledging activity, and we were told that the posters were unrelated, with the implication that they had been put up by people who were “not members of the university community,” but that they had not been apprehended. I was shaken, and the incident was discussed in my African American studies class the next day. I felt ashamed and scared; others were angry. I had debated bringing the poster to the class for others to see, but I didn’t, in part because I was worried about hurting and scaring my ALANA classmates. Exposing them to the poster seemed more harmful than helpful or educational. But I wasn’t sure about my decision, and I felt somehow implicated. I don’t think I even mentioned that I had seen the posters.

After completing that history course, I decided I would like to seek a concentration in African American Studies. As I walked across campus to inquire

about the process, I wondered whether people who looked like me sought that concentration and whether we were welcome in the program. When asked why I wanted to pursue this direction of study, I couldn't articulate an answer, so perhaps I appeared hesitant or uncommitted. In any case, I met with a cool reception by the African American woman in the office and vague information about how I might proceed. I didn't pursue the concentration, though I went on to take three more courses in the program.

The following semester, I attended meetings of the Student Committee on Racial Awareness (SCORA). As I remember it, SCORA was primarily led by a group of African American men, plus one European American Jewish man whom I knew from my classes. I was interested to discover that he lived off-campus with some African American men. When I asked him why, he replied that they were more trustworthy than Whites. He also took African dance, a class that sometimes shared events with my African drumming class.

I particularly remember one evening in a student lounge where SCORA met. Two African American men were leading the stilted discussion. One of them had a soft diction that included sounds that are common to African American speech. The other had a crisp, quick verbal style with no sounds that I would identify as African American in origin. The latter man was challenging the group about the assumptions European American people held about African American speech patterns. "If I called you on the phone and you didn't know who I was, would you know that I was African American? What is this 'Black accent' that

white people talk about? How can I have an accent based on the color of my skin?” These were good questions, and they were rhetorical ones, so he didn’t get much response. Then he upped the ante: “White women are the hardest population to deal with on these issues. Liberal white women are the hardest to get through to.” Oh!! That was new to me, though I have since heard and read the same sentiment in several other places. Why is it that liberal white women present such a problem in the discourse of race? This very incident might hold some clues.

The meeting was small, perhaps 10-12 people sitting in a lounge on couches and armchairs. It was my third meeting of the group, and I knew everyone by name, but none well. The two men leading the discussion were somewhat public figures on campus. The one who was challenging the group was the conductor of the well-renowned gospel group, the Ebony Singers, on campus (he now conducts a similar group in New York City, to high acclaim). The other was a resident advisor and sang in the Ebony Singers as well. As far as I can remember, the group had laid no ground rules for discussions and done no trust-building exercises, or perhaps they had done so before I began attending. At any rate, the conversation wasn’t flowing. I was petrified and didn’t say a word. Here was an articulate and assertive man, a year or two ahead of me in school, naming assumptions (some of which I held), challenging us to be accountable for those assumptions and to wrestle with them. I did so, internally, and I’m grateful for his leadership in raising the issues. I didn’t contribute to the discussion, though. Why

not? It might have been because I didn't want to make a bigger mess, I didn't want to expose my ignorance and stereotypes, and I didn't feel I had anything of value to add. It was too risky. The tenor of the discourse, the culture of it, was uncomfortable to me. Was it because the leadership was African American? Was it the multiracial composition of the group, the subject matter, the gender dynamic? Was it because of the cultural norms in which I was raised, namely, to maintain a put-together exterior no matter what was happening inside? Probably a combination of these.

As I sat silent, mortified and learning in the SCORA meeting, I couldn't come up with any reason why I should speak, never mind an inkling of what I would say. Our facilitator wasn't skilled in drawing people out, or at least I can say he didn't know how to draw out liberal white women! None of us spoke.

Now I believe I would handle things differently. First, I would take a video or picture of the group of men. I would call everyone to the window, and call the police (and I would understand the complexity of doing so, since police have sometimes worn the sheets themselves). I would take down the posters and show them to everyone. I would call the newspaper and write a letter to the editor. I would recount the events for my national on-line networks of educators and others doing antiracist work. I have taken all of these actions (except for taking photos and video) in the more recent past in response to racism, and I am increasingly called to action.

Speaking Up/Standing Up

Recently I spoke to the head librarian in my little community library about *Little Black Sambo*³ being on display in the children's book room, within easy reach of my four-year-old daughter. The book had been there from time to time, and it had been sticking in my craw for the couple of years that I'd watched it come and go. Our community library is thoughtfully managed, and so I could not understand why this book was there, prominently displayed in the children's room, at eye level to a young child. One day I finally spoke up. It was quiet in the library, and the head librarian, a European American woman about my age whom I like and admire as highly competent and who is unfailingly and insightfully kind to my child, was alone in her office. I knocked on her door with *Little Black Sambo* in my hand, aware that my daughter was watching and listening curiously. "Hi Sherrie," I said, "I've been wanting to ask you about this book and why it's here." "A number of people have asked for it," she said. "For their kids?" I inquired. "Yes, for their kids." "Do you know why?" "Some people feel strongly that fairy tales and folk tales should remain in their original form." "Well, then I would recommend either not displaying it or putting it above the kids' heads. If their parents want to give it to them, I guess there's nothing to be done about that, but they shouldn't be able to get it themselves and see this racist stuff without at least the hope of a parental filter. I don't want my daughter seeing this. I know you have a lot of different perspectives you're trying to accommodate here, but I wanted to register mine." So she thanked me and took the book into her office.

About 20 minutes later, as I was playing with my daughter in the children's room, she returned and said that she had looked over the book herself, then read on-line what the American Library Association said about the book. She said, "I read what they had to say about how the old version of the book was mostly considered racist because of the pictures of plantations, people in chains, etc. and how this version has eliminated those pictures. The ALA now thinks this book is fine. But I used to teach in the inner city and I don't think it's fine; I disagree with them. I just looked through the book again myself, and I'm going to reclassify it and put it in the adult section."

From my point of view, this was a successful intervention. I wrote the librarian a thank you note. I think our library is a better place now, particularly the children's room. But it was long in coming. It literally took me years to work up to this relatively benign conversation. I had been looking at that book on occasional display, leafing through it again and again, wondering why it was there and what I should do about it. I had planned to research the ALA's opinions about it myself, but had never done so. It took a quiet day at the library, with no other adults present, for me to act.

In an Associated Press article published in the Burlington Free Press on February 5, 2001, Vermont Attorney General Sorrell discussed the disparity in numbers of incarcerated African Americans compared to members of other groups.⁴ Attorney General Sorrell stated, "You've got a question of whether there is some in-built bias in the system, or the tough question to raise is whether it's

just that the African American population offends at a higher rate.” This statement raised many questions that I pondered for a long time: How can European Americans rise above the pervasive cultural stereotypes like, “Blacks are prone to crime”? How do I enter into a discussion with Attorney General Sorrell about the racism inherent in his statement without closing him off to learning? Now that this statement has been read by thousands of people, confirming for many what they already “knew” about African Americans and crime, how can that damage be undone, even if Attorney General Sorrell decided he wanted to retract it? And how much of the racial bias expressed in the article reflects the attorney general, the reporter or the powers-that-be at the newspaper?

I decided to write Sorrell and express my concerns. Here was my initial e-mail message to him:

Dear Attorney General Sorrell:

I am writing to express my deep concern about your suggestion that the percentage of African Americans in Vermont prisons may reflect the greater propensity of African Americans toward crime. This is a racist statement, and it particularly reflects ignorance about the African American population in Vermont. The reason for the disproportionate numbers of African Americans in Vermont prisons is racial profiling. I have seen African Americans stopped in stores and while driving in Vermont, without provocation. I also know of a teenager accosted by the police at gun point for doing nothing. This is happening everywhere in the country, and Vermont is no different.

I am currently taking a graduate course called "Challenges of Multiculturalism" at the University of Vermont. One of my classmates is a sheriff, and the basic information we are learning about racism and other forms of social oppression is new to him. I'm glad he's there, but the fact that he could have a leadership position in our police force without the benefit of such basic knowledge is appalling.

We have a lot of work to do in Vermont. You are a leader in the state, and we need you to model deep thought about justice for the rest of us. I encourage you to think more carefully about this issue.

Thank you,

Edorah Frazer
Charlotte, VT

Attorney General Sorrell responded the same day, listing all of the additional questions on his mind that he said he had mentioned to the reporter, all of which were based on a suspicion that racial profiling was occurring in the Vermont “criminal justice” system. The other issues he raised can be ascertained from my second message to him:

Dear Mr. Sorrell:

Thank you for your quick and thoughtful response to my message. I did not mean to imply that you intentionally made a racist remark. I do think, though, that your quote in the Burlington Free Press reflects the commonly held implication that African Americans are prone to crime, which is based in racism. You were quoted as saying, "You've got a question of whether there is some in-built bias in the system, or the tough question to raise is whether it's just that the African American population offends at a higher rate." Because of the prevalence of racial profiling, there are no clean statistics about crime patterns among races. If we watched, followed, arrested and implicated Caucasians⁵ as frequently and invasively as we do African Americans, I have no doubt that Caucasians would be found to have similar crime rates. To assume or suggest otherwise is racist.

Unfortunately, your statement will reinforce the racist assumption that most Caucasian people already hold about African Americans and crime. It will not be easy to communicate to the public that read that article the context that you included in your message to me. I encourage you to try. There are also some wonderful people in Vermont who are doing antiracism training, and it would be good for everyone if they were employed to help look at and address the issue of the discrepancy in the incarceration rates of African Americans and other races.

In your e-mail message you mention another set of questions that concern me: "...there are legitimate questions relating to the links between crime and poverty rates, single parent families, levels of educational attainment and the like." OK, but what does this have to do with race? In this state, all of those factors describe Caucasians in far greater proportion than African Americans, I believe. Again, the assumption that poverty, single parenthood, and poor education describe African Americans is based in racism.

Finally, many of the questions in your e-mail are much more to the point of the issue. Why do you think reporter Fred Bever ignored them? An article that had highlighted those subjects could have been very helpful in raising important issues.

I appreciate the opportunity to be in dialogue with you about these issues. I believe that you have the best intentions and are working hard to ensure justice for all Vermonters. I just think these are issues that require a very long and careful look, along with a dialogue rich with varied voices.

Thanks for engaging in the conversation.

Sincerely,
Edorah Frazer

Mr. Sorrell's second response was very brief, thanking me and inviting me to call him Bill, but not addressing any of my concerns. Applying Beatrice Fennimore's four-step method for addressing prejudiced statements⁶, I find some clues as to how my approach resulted in a lack of substantive response from Mr. Sorrell:

1) Restate the prejudice in a calm, objective way

I wrote:

I do think, though, that your quote in the Burlington Free Press reflects the commonly held implication that African Americans are prone to crime, which is based in racism.... If we watched, followed, arrested and implicated Caucasians as frequently and invasively as we do African Americans, I have no doubt that Caucasians would be found to have similar crime rates. To assume or suggest otherwise is racist.

I consider this an objective statement, though I wasn't calm when I wrote it. Is it ill-advised to use the term "racist" in such an exchange? Where is the balance between waking someone up and shutting them down?

2) State personal beliefs clearly and assertively

While I certainly let my beliefs be known, I mostly stated them in declarative terms, rather than making more personal "I" statements.

3) Make a positive statement about the subjects of the prejudice

I did not make any positive statements about all of the societal contributions that are being made by African American Vermonters. I contradicted the implications of Mr. Sorrell, but I failed to replace them with positive images.

4) Turn the subject in a new direction

I wrote:

There are also some wonderful people in Vermont who are doing anti-racism training, and it would be good for everyone if they were employed to help look at and address the issue of the discrepancy in the incarceration rates of African Americans and other races.

This statement did suggest a new direction that Sorrell could constructively take based on the problem I identified.

Soon after this exchange with Sorrell, I was invited by Hal Colston, who had also been in dialogue with Sorrell about these issues, to join a group of people who would be meeting with Attorney General Sorrell to discuss these issues. My journal at the time displayed my strategy:

I would like to make several points to him, but more importantly I want to give him the opportunity to explore his own beliefs. I think I will say something like this:

I believe that we European American Vermonters have a long way to go to eradicate racist thoughts within ourselves. I also believe, however, that the vast majority of Vermonters would wish for Vermont to be free of racism. In order to close the gap between the reality of racism in the State and the way we would like it to be, we have to be willing to grapple with our assumptions and to help each other strip them of racism. What do you think about that? How do you think we can do that together? Do you think that you, your office, or the various levels of the law enforcement and corrections systems can benefit from training regarding racism? Is there any follow-up message that you would like to give the public with regard to this discussion, and how might you issue it? Can we help you?

The crux of the question for me is, how are we European Americans going to educate ourselves and each other on these issues, when ignorance runs so deep and defensiveness so high? I'm honestly less worried about the raging bigots – Klan members, and the like. They are dangerous as individuals, but institutionalized racism is far more pervasive and insidious. Our task, my task, is to find a balance between courage and humility and to press on, building the community of support and wisdom in addressing the disease of racism.

Allies

As a European American concerned with racial justice, it's not easy to find a population of such understanding people in the European American world. I know of individuals, those European Americans who have done enough study and/or work on themselves that while they continue to benefit in any number of

ways from their majority status, nonetheless they make consistent effort to work toward justice and to correct the imbalance of power in our society.

When teaching courses on racism to students in predominantly White institutions, Beverly Daniel Tatum assigns autobiographies of European American antiracist activists and invites guest speakers in to inspire her European American students to action. “Such books can be an antidote to the feelings of isolation and loneliness that White people often feel at this point [of identity development]...My White students, who often comment about how depressing it is to study racism, typically say that the opportunity to talk with [a White antiracist] ally gave them renewed hope.”⁷

Contrary to Tatum’s observation, however, in meeting and/or reading the work of those European Americans who are ahead of me on the path of white identity development, I have noticed that rather than feel the warmth of companionship with them, I sometimes feel competitive. I find myself looking for their weaknesses and unexamined privilege. It saddens me and isolates me further to notice that I feel a sense of competition with these people who should constitute my support system. My internal criticism of my European American colleagues, even as they demonstrate commitment and skill in antiracist work, suggests that I have not quite entered the Immersion/Emersion stage of identity development described by Helms. In this stage, European Americans seek models of antiracist activism to support their emerging commitment and strengthen their white identity for the work ahead.

Antiracist activist Tim Wise describes how he once wished to be “the leading white antiracist theorist and activist in the country.” In an interview, Wise talks about the intoxication of public notoriety for his antiracism work, and how it led him to neglect to develop leadership capacity in the antiracist movement he was involved in as a student at Tulane. When he left, the movement started to fall apart. He reflected on his mistake:

I knew it wasn’t because I was this person who was inherently more capable. I knew this. But I had screwed up and hadn’t done the collective work that I needed to do. Now I try to surround myself with people who support and love me and aren’t that impressed with me.⁸

Wise travels nationally to speak to large audiences and the media about institutionalized racism in the United States. He uses his talents and ambition to valuable ends in his tireless antiracism work. I appreciate his candor in describing the allure of recognition for his work and his consistency in positioning himself at the microphone.

I recently proposed an all-white study group on racism to my colleagues in a national professional development network. Tatum encourages European Americans to meet in all-white support groups “to work through feelings of guilt and shame” and discuss racial experiences with candor that might be impossible or difficult in racially mixed groups.⁹ I proposed the on-line group because we had been engaged in a discussion about race when an African American participant said that we had created a white space in which she didn’t feel safe. I felt it was important to understand and address the factors that caused her to feel that way, if possible. I also thought there was work to be done among the

European American participants that shouldn't be squelched or aborted by a fear of hurting or offending participants of color. When I made the suggestion of creating an all-white study group for this purpose, one person expressed interest and the rest of the group went silent, very silent. Then I went silent, too. I haven't moved further on the idea, and so far I haven't questioned the silence, either.

In a training I attended earlier this year by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond entitled "Undoing Racism," one of the first concepts that was discussed was the need for people who want to do antiracism work to establish a base of support. When I entered the workshop, I was curious to see who my allies in this work would turn out to be. I imagined that I would recognize most of them, since the same faces seem to appear at any discussion of racial issues in our small state. But I didn't know a soul in the room, and I was excited to feel a whole new resource around me. Two men exhibited an extensive grasp of U.S. history, and infused both data and analysis into our discussions. A UVM undergraduate distilled our dialogue into rap lyrics that captured and expanded the group's understanding of the complex issues we had discussed. There were people from multiracial families and a few from other parts of the world.

On the second evening of the weekend we spent together, we were asked to bring in "cultural sharings." The assignment was intentionally vague, so the results were widely varied. People brought in family pictures, recipes, menorahs and stories of various kinds. One man brought in a series of laminated pictures

from African American history, from Emmett Till to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Finally I screwed up my courage, and with tears in my eyes and a shaky voice, read and sang the following:

I don't have any cultural sharing to do from Europe, or any other country. I don't have artifacts brought over from the old country by my ancestors – recipes, linens, photographs, candlesticks. I don't have songs or poetry taught to me in accents from other places. I am a child of the United States of America. My sensibilities and sensitivities, my anger and pride, my arrogance and my humility about my arrogance – they are American. My insistence on asserting my own voice and my struggle to create space for dissenting ones, my assumptions of entitlement and my desire to expose and dismantle those same assumptions, these are all American. Democracy and capitalism: I was fed on both teats. And while I readily love democracy, I as readily disdain capitalism, yet in my life they are inextricably tangled, and I rest, and struggle, in both. I love this country, its ideals and its daily life. I am the progeny of revolutionaries and cowards, truth-seekers and truth-deniers. The oppressors and the oppressed, they are all my ancestors, because together they made this country, and I am born of this country.

I wanted to sing a song about this country, but as I thought through the lyrics of our various patriotic songs, I couldn't subscribe to any of them. Then I thought of one I felt I could sing and share. And so, I invite those of you who are inclined to sing with me:

Oh beautiful, for spacious skies....

My voice shook so much that it was unrecognizable to me. Several people sang with me. A number of European Americans told me privately afterward that my words had captured their feelings and confusion about their own cultural identity.

As I look back at this speech now, only two months later, my use of the word “American” alongside qualifiers that best describe European Americans (and probably a smaller subset further circumscribed by class) jumps out at me.

About half the group of people who attended the workshop are continuing to meet to further educate ourselves and our community about strategies to undo racism. We are building a base among ourselves to sustain our energy and diversify our resources.

The Way Forward

I first became an activist when I committed myself to redistributing my wealth. A number of strategies I employed in that economic justice work can also be applied to antiracism efforts, though there are some differences. While I could relatively easily give away money as a tangible step toward equity, I can't as easily "give away" privilege based on racial inequality. However, the strategies below provide a way forward into antiracist action.

Developing a Theoretical Framework

On my first trip to Appalachia, I met a community organizer who became a lifelong friend. Together we attended a seminar at the Center for Popular Economics in Massachusetts. It was the first course on economics I'd ever had, and it provided a critique of capitalism that has subsequently informed my understanding of racism as well. Not until I understood that capitalism is predicated on a margin of unemployment and the maintenance of an underclass, could I begin to see my place in the power structure. Later, the additional history and theory of race provided in an "Undoing Racism" workshop by the People's

Institute for Survival and Beyond gave me a clearer understanding of the underpinnings of racism. This knowledge arms me with resources to address racism in my own mind and in the minds of others, on both individual and institutional levels.

Building a Base

Prior to giving away my money, I met with my support group for two years. Together, we educated ourselves about philanthropy and social change. We interviewed others who shared our values and were ahead of us on the path, and soon we found that there were others behind us, following our lead. We recognized the value to our endeavor of the people in each of these roles, and we nurtured our relationships with them.

The same process needs to take place for European Americans doing antiracism work. In writing this dissertation, I entered two different periods of stasis that lasted several months each. In the first such period, I was terrified to ask faculty members to serve on my dissertation committee. I knew that my research process would be messy and painful for me, and I felt that there was a strong likelihood that my professors would share in both the mess and the pain. I felt ashamed of my ignorance, the starting place of my research. I was dwelling in Helms' Disintegration status of identity development – disequilibrium and confusion. Later in the writing process, I again got stuck. I feared that I had nothing insightful to say, and that my writing would appear whiny and laden with

self-absorbed confession. In both cases, I had lost perspective on the purpose and value of this work. I needed both European American and ALANA allies who held similar values and who were also engaged in antiracism work to urge me on. Thankfully, I found them and continued.

When I first wrote about the two stories in Chapter 3 detailing ways I had oppressed my African American students, I shared those stories with a number of European American colleagues. All but one responded with defensiveness, presumably on my behalf. "I don't think you were really racist. Those kids were misbehaving. How can you know you wouldn't have responded the same way to a European American kid? I would have been mad, too." These responses fell within the patterns of avoiding responsibility and maintaining the status quo that Paul Kivel describes in *Uprooting Racism*.¹⁰

One colleague, though, a European American teacher from Indiana whom I had met at a conference, let herself believe me. After reading my story she responded in an e-mail, "I'm sure some people would excuse you and tell you not to be so hard on yourself. If you feel, though, that you were 'putting an African American child in a powerless place,' I appreciate your saying it. I don't see how we can understand the costs of doing so unless we're willing to admit to the thoughts we have."¹¹ This is the most healing piece of feedback I received. Here was a true ally in antiracism work. I knew what I had done and I needed to have an honest conversation about that, or I wouldn't come to understand it, and I might do it again. White allies can help hold up the mirror to one another and hold

each other accountable in a way that would place ALANA allies at much greater risk.

Making It Public

Social justice work, for me, begins in the quiet, internal space where I sort out right from wrong. But convictions and intentions can't change the world without action. In stories throughout this dissertation I have cited my own silence in the face of racism, and I expect there will continue to be times when I fail to speak as I witness racist events and attitudes in play. However, each time I act against racism, I get bolder. The exchange with Attorney General Bill Sorrell described above did not yield a positive outcome in terms of his response, but it did lead to stronger alliances for me with other people in the room. As we flex our activist muscles together, we will increase our effectiveness in making change.

Contributing One's Best

Everyone has a sphere of influence and a skill set of some sort. I am an educator, so I bring valuable skills and knowledge to bear in helping European Americans grow out of racism. Within my social and professional milieus, I am increasingly aware of where people are in their identity development, and how I might help them move to the next step. I am also trained in leading deep and controversial conversations, and that is an essential task in taking on racism.

At the same time, an important contribution for European Americans in antiracism work is practicing conscientious followership. Helping create avenues for ALANA leadership and being a contributing follower when that leadership is in place is a necessary step in balancing the scales of power.

INTERLUDE: A PLEDGE TO END RACISM

I, as a European American person in a society in which European Americans possess predominant power, pledge to actively counter racism when I see it and hear it, working to balance the power in our society;

I, as a European American educator, pledge to help all people see that there is a way of living that is devoid of oppression, fear and hatred, and that is well within our grasp;

I, as a European American woman who was trained to believe that I owned a disproportionately large portion of resources because my forefathers earned that right for me, pledge to redistribute those resources so that all people can share the right to prosperity;

I, as a European American person who is not forced by a hostile environment to focus on my racial identity every day, pledge to ask fellow European Americans the question, "How will we unlearn racism?";

I, as a European American person born and raised to lead a comfortable life, pledge to enter into uncomfortable conversations and situations when they will help me and others understand and counteract racism more fully;

I, as a European American person, pledge to listen for understanding when someone offers me a point of view different from my own;

I, as a European American educator, pledge to embrace and celebrate all children and adults of every color, and honor in them their ability to learn.

(I wrote this pledge and read it at a forum on white privilege held at the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington, Vermont, March 24, 2001.)

CHAPTER 7: CHALLENGING OUR EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Good teaching, good helping, and good leadership are, in one sense, all about storytelling and story-evoking.... Our students ...want to be understood, and to be heard, from the nucleus of the stories they are living.

Robert Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing*

Tackling differences is not just for the sake of fairness or antiracism but also for just plain good education....Stepping intellectually, socially, and morally into the shoes of others is a central part of what it means to be well educated today, and thus it is not a side issue on the way to teaching the multiplication tables but is of equal if not greater importance and requires at least as much intellectual rigor.

Deborah Meier, *In Schools We Trust*

Education is the arena where I will engage most fully in antiracist activity.

My professional skills and sphere of influence involve public schools K-12 and higher education, and in the future I am likely to work in the broader policy arena as well. As a career educator, I am committed to unlearning racism myself and to leading others to do the same. In this chapter I address the components of an antiracism strategy for education. To frame the discussion of educational change, I begin with a story from my own school leadership. Though it addresses an instance of institutionalized sexism rather than racism, the issues involved and the strategies for addressing them are transferable to antiracist leadership.

Education and Justice

The incident began when a normally cheerful and grounded Spanish teacher came to my office looking agitated and asking to speak to me immediately. I was serving as Dean of Students of a small college-preparatory independent school, and usually when a teacher came to me upset, it was because of a difficult interaction with a student. This was such a case. When we went into a conference room, the teacher explained that a student in his class had just been very rude to him. The student had challenged him angrily in class about the fact that he had presented only males in his curriculum on Colombia. She noted that the curriculum had stated that the class would study “the people of Colombia,” but that two men had been presented, and no women. The teacher explained to me that he had included women in other parts of the course, but that he didn’t know enough about any Colombian women to teach about them confidently. He said that until this incident, he had had a great relationship with this student, and he was concerned about tarnishing it. He then asked that I speak with the student about her rude behavior.

Shortly afterward, the student came and asked if she could speak to me. She too looked agitated. The student was a senior and an outspoken leader in the school. She had recently been reading feminist works and had been challenging the faculty on gender issues for several weeks. She described the class events almost exactly as the teacher had; there was no disagreement about the facts of the incident. The student went on to say that she saw no reason to be polite about this

issue, and that she respected the teacher but felt that he had made an error in this case. She felt justified in her anger and passionate about the injustice she was experiencing. She was also angry about the responses of some of her classmates, particularly a female classmate who had said, “Colombian women are probably boring.”

As Dean of Students, my primary job was to tend to the well-being of my students. Frequently, faculty members sought my support in their work with kids, sometimes under adversarial circumstances. In this case, I recognized the teacher’s need to be respected as well as the student’s need to be heard and validated in speaking out against injustice. I also felt immediately hooked by the issue itself; I too believed that the Spanish curriculum should equitably include the study of women. I listened to both the teacher and the student carefully and tried to help each clarify their own and the other person’s feelings and thoughts. Both requested a meeting facilitated by me.

The meeting took place two days later. By that time, both the teacher and the student had settled down somewhat. Each expressed respect for the other and a desire to preserve the relationship. They also agreed that women should be studied throughout the curriculum, and the Spanish teacher thanked the student for bringing the issue to his attention and stated that he would work harder on including women.

The area of disagreement that remained was the question of how such an issue should be raised. The student defended her right – even her responsibility –

to be passionate and angry about injustice toward women. When the teacher remarked that he had thought about her concern as he took his five-mile run the day before, she noted that he might not have if she hadn't pushed the issue so hard. This conversation carried over into a parent conference, in which the mother expressed support of her daughter's passion on this subject. The teacher stated that he would have been better able to listen to the student's concerns if he had not felt like he had to defend himself in the middle of a class.

This disagreement resulted in an educational and ethical dilemma for me. On the one hand, I could focus on my student's behavior as the dominant issue in the situation. I could uphold the value of politeness and respect for authority, and urge the student to be more circumspect in her feedback to her instructors. Or I could appeal to her from a strategic perspective and, rather than talking about politeness or respect, discuss her goal of effectively fighting the oppression of women in school. Would raising her hand and quietly asking why the class wasn't studying Colombian women have been more effective? And what about the classmates who had expressed frustration with her? Did she shake up the girl who had mused about Colombian women being boring in a positive way, or had she lost a potential ally?

Alternatively, I could focus on the issue of sexism in our school's curriculum as the primary issue at hand, both on the grounds that as Dean of Students, my primary responsibility is to support the welfare of the students, and because the situation presented an opportunity to address social injustice present

in one of the very roots of our society – our education system. I had listened well, but what would I be teaching this student and my colleagues if I didn't tackle the issue of injustice?

Both the teacher and the student were positive members of our school community, frequently contributing to the happiness and well being of those around them. My student generally exhibited respect for those around her, so I fully believed that her behavior in this case was due to her perception of injustice. I agree with her that in the face of injustice, bold action is sometimes required. I am not convinced that the Spanish teacher would have changed his curriculum had his student quietly voiced her concern. In this case, I do think the ends justified the means, and though both the teacher and the student were initially unhappy, the greatest good was achieved, due in part to the boldness of the student's actions.

When the events of this case occurred, I was swayed by my sense of loyalty to my beloved colleague, and probably somewhat by my own internalized sexism that can still yield shame and fear when I encounter outspoken women. In the end, I listened carefully to both my student and my colleague and helped them clarify their own thinking and their communication with one another. I helped the student find a college with a strong women's orientation (Sarah Lawrence). I also encouraged her to continue to care and to speak out about injustice against women. But she was looking for a radical response, or at least solidarity, from me - the woman in the school she was closest to, and who carried the most power in

the school. I believe I fell short of my responsibility in this regard. I calmed the interpersonal waters, but stopped short of raising a flag of justice in our school. My conscience bothers me. I believe that the curriculum of our school did indeed reflect our patriarchal culture without drawing attention to itself as a purveyor of patriarchy. Our school espoused democratic education, and it was true that this student's pleas for equity catalyzed several serious pedagogical and curricular conversations among the staff, but ultimately, the changes in practice that occurred as a result were limited to one classroom. We could and should have done more.

Following these events, my student grew quiet on these issues. Other concerns came to the fore in her interactions in the school. Perhaps she was exploring, intellectually and emotionally, a variety of issues in her life. Or perhaps she noticed, as I did, that the issue of gender equity in the curriculum moved quietly down the priority list. Ultimately the teacher did make a significant change in his practice, and I suspect he still carries that student's voice in his head, but these changes took time, and I doubt she knows about them.

Discourse II

The story above took place in a school that was created to provide a more rigorous and effective education than that offered at the local public schools. The school utilized small seminar formats and was known for the close and supportive relationships between and among students and faculty. However, until the

incident described above, there was little to no awareness or discussion about the extent to which the school was involved in the reproduction of social inequities in our society. The school practices remained within the dominant cultural discourse regarding education, which Eubanks, Parish and Smith term Discourse I. They argue that a more serious critical discourse (Discourse II) is required in order to “prepare a cultural ground for change” so that all students really will be educated well and educators will understand the ways in which they are unconsciously reproducing aspects of the hegemonic culture that they would rather transform.¹

Learning in Community

Educators at all levels, from pre-service teachers to seasoned school administrators and higher education faculty, need to engage in rigorous and ongoing dialogue about what kind of society we are trying to create. Without such conversations between us as a faculty, in our education seminars, and in our public school classrooms, board meetings and community events, the exclusive and normative practice of white privilege will thoughtlessly continue, and we will have little hope of effectively addressing the societal and planetary challenges that face us.

The resources of time, money and personnel will be applied to the problem of racism in schools only when the issue is given primacy. What will increase the community’s investment in addressing racism within its ranks? What is needed is a much broader initiative to open a Discourse II dialogue on race in

schools in such a way that cross-cultural understanding is authentically built, and white identity development can move forward for the white majority in our teaching population. There can be no substitute for people speaking from their own experiences about racism. Providing a safe, carefully facilitated forum for such discussion is a sophisticated educational response to the foundation of ignorance upon which racism is built. Such a forum is unlikely to be successful, however, if it is thrust upon the school community without substantial previous work among educators. The best preparation for this situation is for adults to have engaged in training beforehand that helps them face their own questions, fears and ignorance regarding race. Karen Saudek of the Vermont Advisory Committee on Civil Rights observed, “We have a sense that people freeze when there is a racial incident in their school.”² There are a variety of organizations that offer anti-racism training in schools. On-site faculty training in schools can provide faculty with a common vocabulary and base of experience with which to sustain the conversation about race.

Anti-racism training is a tender business, on any level. In order to address the reality of racism in schools, an atmosphere of caring and common commitment must be developed. Groups of people must come together to listen carefully to one another, and to do so with true curiosity. Margaret Wheatley identifies another essential component to this conversation:

As we work together to restore hope to the future, we need to include a new and strange ally – our willingness to be disturbed. Our willingness to have our beliefs and ideas challenged by what others think. No one person or perspective can give us the answers we need to the problems of today.

Paradoxically, we can only find those answers by admitting we don't know. We have to be willing to let go of our certainty and expect ourselves to be confused for a time.³

Over time, members of educational communities engaged in such conversations can find ways to hold up windows and mirrors for one another so that the racist assumptions and actions in their school communities can be discussed in ways that lead to effective change.

Student Voice

Because schools are engaged in such a high-risk endeavor – people's minds, and even lives, are at risk – educators need constantly to be vigilant about the ethics of their work. In particular, students' voices and experiences should be valued and given room for expression so that students may make meaning from and of their lives. Student voices can and will make educators uncomfortable, particularly when they are challenging the practices of the teacher or educational institution. In spite of their discomfort, educators need to open up space for such conversations, creatively and enthusiastically engaging students in assessing their educational environments. Then, if they find that their practices silence students, diminish their opportunities for development, or create inequitable conditions, they need to stand prepared to change their practice, quickly and effectively.

Educator Preparation

The questions I now have about teacher preparation and educational leadership programs in institutions of higher education are these:

- 1) How, after students have completed their student teaching or administrative internship at a predominantly white institution, can the university recommend them for a teaching/administrative license that qualifies them to teach/lead in virtually any school in the country? What travels will they have taken to immerse themselves in other cultures? What windows and mirrors will the program have afforded them to be able to gain insight into the breadth of our pluralistic society? Do these students even know themselves, not just in terms of their individual personalities, strengths and weaknesses, but also in terms of the privilege or oppression to which they are subject?
- 2) What conversations are occurring on the faculty level relative to these issues?
- 3) I would like to ask the student teachers and administrative interns:

When you go to teach/lead the students at your internship site, what essentially do you think you're doing there? What are the students doing? If you are teaching the Pythagorean theorem, or osmosis, or declensions of a language, or the Revolutionary War, or how to read or write a short story, why are you doing so? To what end? What is the larger context of these pursuits?

These are the conversations we need to ask of our education programs in higher education. My own best education has come experientially, through travel and service. Through those experiences I was able to begin to examine and understand my race and class privilege, an exploration that is now a daily part of my life.

I would argue that any student is unlikely to become an equitable educator without having examined her/his own identity and place with regard to race and class. These ideas can be introduced and explored in a university classroom, to some degree, but experiential learning is potentially much more powerful. In their article, "Meeting in the Middle: Preparing Teachers on Predominantly White Campuses for Diverse Classrooms," Cynthia Reyes and Penny Bishop describe their experience engaging in critical pedagogy to expose the pre-service teachers in their predominantly white classes to diversity.⁴ Through reciprocal visits between their UVM classroom and eighth grade classrooms in Boston, Reyes and Bishop created an opportunity for dialogue with their students about their white identity as it pertained to teaching. De-centering the pre-service teachers' experience became a priority when they discovered that class discussions of readings alone raised significant questions for their students that they could not sufficiently address without direct contact with young students in their own classrooms. The questions that the university students raised following their time in Boston demonstrated much deeper learning than their initial questions from text-based discussions on campus.

As teachers new to the profession replace the aging teacher corps, we will have a renewed opportunity to address racism in our institutions. We need to recruit ALANA students into the profession of education and assist European American students in developing habits of self-reflection regarding identity issues. At the same time, school leaders need to engage existing faculties in the same endeavors of reflection, dialogue and exposure to multiple viewpoints that expose the complexity and the promise of addressing racism in our educational institutions.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

We may have all come over on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now.... We must not give up; we must not give in; we must not give out.

Congressman John R. Lewis UVM 2007 Commencement Address

A nice lady in the back...asked what I thought about how we begin to move forward. I think it is up to each individual, which then moves to your family, which moves to your community. Each person, in your own life, let your life be a light for peace, for justice, for all that is good. Just let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Oprah Winfrey

In writing this dissertation I had four goals: to propel myself forward in my racial identity development, to engage others in discourse about unlearning and dismantling racism, to offer readers motivation and support for their own self-reflection regarding race, and to develop skills and strategies for antiracism work. As I anticipated, this research has been difficult: confusing, painful, lonely and sometimes frustrating. As I grappled in the fog, I often had no idea whether any of my goals would be achieved. Toward the end, the fog began to lift, and as I engaged people in conversations about my discoveries, asked for their insights and shared drafts of writing, I began to see evidence that my goals were being realized.

When I began writing about unlearning racism, I felt young, ignorant and awkward with regard to the subject. Though I had thought a lot about the racial

experiences of ALANA people, looking at my own racial identity was new – an afterthought, born of unconscious privilege. I found that in order to get my hands on the racism I harbored so that I could pull it out, I first had to look squarely at my race and class privilege and sense of entitlement. As my research unfolded I moved in a spiral from confusion toward clarity, from guilt and fear toward conviction, and finally, from passivity toward action. Helms' identity development model provided valuable perspective on my progress and challenges along the way.

As an educator and citizen, I'm committed to making a change. I want European Americans to be aware of the ways in which we are beneficiaries and perpetrators of an oppressive system. The onus is on European Americans to take stock of our participation in the equation of racial oppression. We need to talk to each other; this is particularly our responsibility as educators and as leaders. We need to do this in order to be free.

As someone who was born and raised into positions of privilege, I want to use the power I have responsibly, to lead when I am in situations that can benefit from my leadership, and to follow and support when I can serve better as an ally to others in their leadership. I want to become a better, bolder, more resourceful, creative and committed ally to anyone who is oppressed. I want to step toward people with an open heart and a curious mind.

Recently I've noticed that when racist images arise in my thoughts, the more familiar ones are so cliché that they sound silly. They have about the same

power as a catchy tune that you hate but can't get off your mind – annoying, but not mind-altering. Yet there are other shards of racism that still fly through my system like shrapnel from time to time – my classroom stories provided examples. In those two instances, I didn't know what had hit me until years later. Now that I've discovered and analyzed those events, I believe I can dismantle that particular strain of racism and avoid repeating the past. With continued vigilance, I might discover other roots of prejudice that I will have to pull as well. I expect that this will be a lifelong task.

My experience suggests that honest self-reflection, personal relationships, mentoring, travel, study and antiracist action are all elements of an effective antitoxin against racism. I haven't found the agent that can completely eradicate racism from the European American psyche, but someday, a new generation will be born that doesn't need the concept of race, and it will go. My work is to clear the way.

It would be nice to end this dissertation with a declaration that I have emerged into the full sunlight of Helms' final stage of identity development, Autonomy, where one is strong, clear and appropriately proud in her white identity. I'm not there yet, and along the way it has sometimes been hard even to envision such a state. But increasingly, I do see that I am joining a courageous and committed group of European Americans committed to an antiracist life.

EPILOGUE

As I looked at the smooth, clear surface of the Pond of Privilege, gazing at my placid reflection, I started noticing small streams of bubbles rising to the surface. “There’s something down there,” I thought, as I looked past my own reflection into the depths below. Indeed, there were faces, first one (Peggy McIntosh), then another, then another. They were beckoning me to join them, to enter the water. I dove in with no small fear, but I was intrigued, drawn in by the wisdom, humility and clarity in their expressions. As soon as I descended below the surface, they began to teach me how to breathe. Slow and even, was the way, no gulping. “You have to remain aware of what you’re doing, that’s the thing,” said Lillian Smith. “If you get greedy or scared and try to take in more than you need, you start to drown.” I took in quite a bit of water as I practiced. I had to go back to the surface over and over to familiar territory, gorging myself on the abundance of the air above. But each time I passed through the surface and remained longer in the depths, I saw more possibilities there. There were all kinds of people doing all kinds of things. There were places, colors, rhythms, and such beautiful sounds. There were subtleties and complexities and textures, and soon I knew I wanted to master my breathing, so that I could live in the depths.

Many people I cared about were above the surface, and I would not abandon them. I considered ways to help them come to the Pond of Privilege, to look at and then past their reflections, so that they too could enter the depths and

enjoy the abundant life below. Some of them, I knew, would never make it. They were too fearful, or too absorbed and intoxicated by their land-lives, or they lacked the imagination and curiosity to consider the possibility of another existence. I told these people where I had been and what I had seen, and that was the best I could do. But there were others who listened more carefully, who looked at the glint in my eye, who heard a new and unfamiliar timbre in my voice, and they wanted to know more. Some joined me as I returned to the water's edge. When they looked at the surface, some of them couldn't see themselves at all. They tried to look below the surface immediately, even reaching into the water to see if they could touch the depths I had described. "No," I explained. "You need to look at yourself first, noticing everything. Look at your skin, your hair, your lips. Look at the expression of your mouth, the way you hold your head. Dance and watch your feet, and the way you move your hips and shoulders. Breathe and watch the way you hold the air in your chest. Look at the shape and texture of your hands. Then look into your eyes, and see what's there. Look for your ancestors. Look for your beliefs. Look and look." And when they had done this, they saw the bubbles. "What's that?" one would gasp, another whisper, now looking past their reflections. And it would be a wise and clear face, waiting eagerly or patiently, with arms beckoning or open, as the seeker required. From there, most would enter the water and glimpse the riches below, and many would eventually master the discipline of breathing just the air they needed. Some would then return to the surface to draw others to the Pond of Privilege. Others would

dive down, and never look back. At each stage, a few retreated, some walking thoughtfully away, some shaking their heads in anger or disbelief. These last put up fences, denied the stories of others, and polluted the pond with all manner of toxin.

But those who dwelt in the depths were creative and resourceful beyond all awareness of the land-livers. Some of the toxins injured them and caused them great hardship, but they learned many ways to cleanse the depths and to further beautify them. For there were a great many people who had been dwelling in the depths for generations, having arrived not through the Pond of Privilege, but through the Pond of Oppression. These elders, along with the newer arrivals, had created communities of rich variety. They used the gifts of each one present to create new textures, colors and harmonies. Together they had learned to trust that from complexity would arise clarity, and that with clarity, would come freedom.

NOTES

Chapter 1

¹Reprinted in Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 2002), 37.

² Peggy McIntosh, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege," *Peace and Freedom* (July/August 1989).

³ Janet E. Helms, "Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development," in *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Janet E. Helms Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990), 49-66.

⁴ Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom," *Harvard Educational Review* 62, no. 1 (1992).

⁵ Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Norton, 1949), 14.

⁶ Anne Braden, *The Wall Between* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 339.

⁷ Robert J. Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative* (New York City: Teachers College Press, 2004), 161.

⁸ A complete explanation of the fallacious arguments of a genetic basis for race can be found in Joseph L. Graves, Jr., *The Race Myth: Why We Pretend Race Exists in America* (New York: Dutton, 2004).

⁹ "Bodies...The Exhibition," Rochester Museum, New York, 27 November 2008.

¹⁰ Joseph L. Graves, *The Race Myth: Why We Pretend Race Exists in America* (New York: Dutton, 2004), x.

¹¹ Amoja Three Rivers, *Cultural Etiquette: A Guide for the Well-Intentioned* (Gladstone, VA: Market Wimmin, 1990), 8.

Chapter 2

¹ Hal Colston, personal communication, 25 January 2008.

² McIntosh.

³ Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Norton, 1949); Maurice Berger, *White Lies* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women: Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Becky Thompson, "Time Traveling and Border Crossing: Reflections on White Identity" (In *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, eds. Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi, 93-110. New York: Routledge, 1996); Ann Braden, *The Wall Between* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Paula Rothenberg, *Invisible Privilege: A Memoir about Race, Class & Gender* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴ Scholarly personal narrative has increasingly attracted researchers who have been marginalized due to race, class, sexual orientation and other aspects of identity.

⁵ Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks* (New York: Knopf, 1935).

⁶ "Undoing Racism," People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (workshop held at St. Michael's College, Colchester, VT, 12-15 October 2007).

⁷ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005).

⁸ Deborah Meier, *In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Robert J. Nash, "Fostering Moral Conversations in the College Classroom," *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 7, no. 1 (1996): 83-105.

¹¹ Three Rivers, 21.

¹² Helms.

Interlude

¹ James Banks, "Multiculturalism: Theory and Best Practices in Higher Education Transformation" (lecture presented at the University of Vermont, 2 August 2007).

² Eileen O'Brien, *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

Chapter 3

³ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005).

⁴ Gladwell, 96.

⁵ Lee Mun Wha, *The Color of Fear* (Stir Fry Productions, 1994).

⁶ Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).

Chapter 4

⁷ I now work at the polls at every election, checking in voters and counting ballots.

⁸ My mother explained that waiters in the best restaurants are trained not to draw attention to themselves; they are to perform their work with a minimum of disruption to the party being served. Thus, to acknowledge them is actually to make their job harder. This is another example of the complexity of the roles and relationships across race and class. I continue to thank waiters.

⁹ Our use of Augusta's familiar name, Gussie, was a point of contention between her and her niece. Her niece felt it was disrespectful, and I now understand her point. I considered using Gussie's formal name as I wrote this piece, but my feeling of intimacy with her, and the dynamics of the social roles we inhabited would both have been misrepresented if I had done so.

¹⁰ At my oldest sister's wedding, Gussie and I shared a room in a five-star hotel. As we lay on the bed looking at the room service menu together, Gussie pointed to the cost of a lamb chop. "Lord, look at that!" she declared. "For that price, I could buy the whole lamb!" We couldn't stop laughing after that. Our environment was absurd and problematic to both of us.

¹¹ Laurent A. Parks Daloz and others, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 113.

¹² Mary F. Belenky, Lynne A. Bond, and Jacqueline S. Weinstock, *A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

¹³ Parks Daloz, 113.

¹⁴ Richard Wright, *Native Son*, Goodman Theater (Chicago, October 1978).

¹⁵ Robert J. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York City: Paulist Press, 1977).

¹⁶ Tatum, "Talking about Race."

¹⁷ Vanguard Foundation, *Robin Hood Was Right: A Guide to Giving Your Money for Social Change* (San Francisco: Vanguard Foundation, 1977).

¹⁸ The Haymarket People's Fund holds annual donor conferences for people with wealth and a sense of social justice to discuss various personal and political issues associated with wealth.

¹⁹ Christopher Mogil and Anne Slepian, *We Gave Away a Fortune: Stories of People Who Have Devoted Themselves and Their Wealth to Peace, Justice and a Healthy Environment* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992).

²⁰ *The Studs Terkel Program*, radio show (24 November 1992).

²¹ *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, "Walking Away from Wealth," television performance (December 1992).

²² bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 76.

²³ Molly Lopez, and Jill Smolowe, "They Gave Away Half Their Money!" *People Magazine* (24 December 2007): 79-82.

²⁴ Pilar Gonzales, personal communication, 18 December 2007.

²⁵ Jennifer Jacobson, "Scaling the Ivory Tower: How Activists are Trying to Diversify the Academy and Why Progress is Slow," *On Campus* 24, no. 3 (2008): 10-15.

Chapter 5

¹ Nelson, Stanley and Gail Pellett, *Shattering the Silence* (Gail Pellett Productions, 1996).

² Emily Bernard, ed., *Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

³ Carson McCullers, "A Tree - A Rock - A Cloud," In *Collected Stories of Carson McCullers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), 125-133.

⁴ A nignun is a Hebrew chant, often wordless, with a compelling melody that creates a meditative, communal atmosphere for prayer.

⁵ Jerone and Jenieke Macy are pseudonyms for the people involved.

⁶ Gladwell, 96-97.

Chapter 6

¹ For a compelling discussion of the ways in which IQ tests are geared toward owning class white males, see Deborah Meier, "Why Tests Don't Test What We Think They Do," in *In Schools We Trust* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 95-118.

² Michael Meade, performance, University of Washington (Spring, 1992).

³ Helen Bannerman, *Little Black Sambo* (London: Lippincott, 1899).

⁴ “Blacks Jailed at Disproportionate Rate, *Burlington Free Press*, 5 February 2001, 3B.

⁵ The use of the term “Caucasian” in these letters dates my developmental stage in understanding race. I was yet to learn that the term implied a superior race.

⁶ Beatrice S. Fennimore, "Addressing Prejudiced Statements: A Four-step Method that Works," *Childhood Education* 70, no.4 (Summer 1994).

⁷ Beverly Daniel Tatum, “*Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” and *Other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 109.

⁸ Cooper Thompson, Emmett Schaefer, and Harry Brod, eds., *White Men Challenging Racism: 35 Personal Stories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 155.

⁹ Beverly Daniel Tatum, “*Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” and *Other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 111.

¹⁰ Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 2002), 40.

¹¹ Barb Backler, personal e-mail, 21 March 2002.

Chapter 7

¹ Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith, "Changing the Discourse in Schools," in *Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism: Policy and Practice*, ed. Peter Hall (New York: Routledge, 1997).

² Brent Hallenbeck, *Burlington Free Press*, 17 March 1999, B6.

³ Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002), 34.

⁴ Cynthia Reyes and Penny A. Bishop, "Meeting in the Middle: Preparing Teachers on Predominantly White Campuses for Diverse Classrooms," *Teacher Education & Practice* 18, no. 2 (2005): 137-156.

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